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Miles Hall

THE HOUSE OF THE
WEEPING WOMAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE WORKER AND
OTHER POEMS

THE MACMILLAN CO., NEW YORK

THE HOUSE OF THE WEEPING WOMAN

BY

CONINGSBY WILLIAM DAWSON

TORONTO

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*Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that
they fought for comes about in spite of their
defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be
what they meant, and other men have to fight for
what they meant under another name.*

WILLIAM MORRIS
In "A Dream of John Ball."

CHAPTER I

AT THE SIGN OF THE WEEPING WOMAN

TURNPIKE THOROUGHFARE is a broad and busy street lying just outside the limits of the City of London—about a mile to the north-east of the Mansion House.

Never having been at any time in history a fashionable quarter, it still retains its plebeian character, and is for the most part occupied by decayed working-men's dwellings, factories, and large wholesale houses. Its attitude toward the City proper is that of a poor relation—thrust out of sight, never introduced to company, and expected to do with humble gratitude the menial task unthanked. Yet here and there among the ugly and more modern architecture is some of much earlier date, belonging to a period when what are now streets were open fields, whither the 'prentices and journeymen of the Cheap brought their sweethearts and wives on the long summer evenings to watch them at their contests of bow and ball.

As landmarks of this happier age stand many ancient hostelries bearing quaint signs: "The Fisher's Folly," "The Tankard," "The Friend of Ease." Some of these still pursue their aforetime commerce; some have been converted into shops. In the number of the latter must be ranked "The Weeping Woman," which lies to the northern extremity of The Turnpike, standing back some dozen paces from the line of pavement, almost facing the mediæval church of St. Lawrence the Just.

The sign of "The Weeping Woman," bearing the weather-beaten semblance of one robed in scarlet, carrying a child in her arms with down-bowed head, still swings above the doorway; but the jovial hospitality which it once betokened for the incoming traveller who arrived over-late at the City Gate has vanished with departing years. The tavern was converted into a mixed book and stationery shop fifty years ago by Giles Lancaster, a strong temperance advocate arrived before his time, who had hoped to elevate the moral tone of the community in which he dwelt by the sale of classic books at reduced prices.

At this time John, grandson of the pioneer, was in possession. A man of no fixed creed, certainly of no temperance bias, he was beset, behind and before, by the hereditary chastener of the Lancasters, an overwhelming and tormenting conscience. He had grown up in the belief that family honour forbade the abandonment of this quixotic adventure.

This evening he sat at the open window of his attic study, with a large seventeenth-century volume of Raleigh's *History of the World* upon his knees.

The room faced towards the east, and the burning red of an August sunset smote from behind upon the sombre-coloured roofs of the leagues of houses opposite with a sudden and unaccustomed glory; drifting across the street, it lit up the grey, monotonous sea of slate and chimney-pot with flashings of copper and of gold. From below came up the unceasing ejaculations of a tireless city, the roar of traffic, and cries of costers vending their wares.

Lancaster was a tall man, six-foot-two at least, but narrow of shoulder and chest. His hair was long, lank, and black; his forehead high and wrinkled; his eyes grey and somewhat stern; his mouth large and thin of lip, inclined to droop at the corners, betokening despondency,

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yet ever ready to smile, and kindly; the chin firm, pointed, and clean-shaven; the nose delicate and arched; his age about thirty, though he looked older. The entire configuration of his face was intellectual, and produced in the stranger, by reason of its mingled power and melancholy, a singular sense of reverence tinged with pity; for it bore the inevitable shadow of one who has been doomed by Circumstance not to succeed.

As he sat in the darkening room his long, thin fingers turned page after page with the listless frequency of one who takes no interest in that which he reads. Every now and again he would pause to listen, half rise from his chair, and then, finding himself mistaken, resume his profitless task. At last there came the jangling of a bell. With a look of infinite relief he jumped up, smiling to himself, and left the room. Soon there was the sound of a door opened and closed, and of footsteps ascending the stairs. When he re-entered he was accompanied by a man who, crossing the dusky attic, approached the window and leant far out, so that the reflected light of the world below smote up into his face.

He was a striking boy of not more than twenty-two years. His hair, which was worn longer than is customary among men of to-day, was of a shining golden colour, touched with bronze. His forehead was broad and extremely white, traversed by curls which fell away at the temples. His nose was straight and prominent; his eyes full, deep-set, and of a shadowy grey. The lips, slightly pouting, and of a rich red, seemed to be for ever parted, as if eager for speech. His brows were heavy, regularly curved, and of a darker shade than his hair; whilst the lids were thickly fringed with lashes so long that at times they almost screened his eyes. He was emphatically one born with a large destiny, which, however, the sensitive lines of the face half hinted he was too tender to fulfil.

There was a startling purity in his bearing which left others wondering how any one, who had lived for even so short a space as he, could have kept his body so undefiled, and his eyes so truthful. He bore the marks of one bound upon a quest which called forth only the noblest elements in his being—one who not only possessed to the full the capacity to dream, but who could restore the power of vision to others, from whom it had departed. When he spoke, there was a certain lyric quality in his voice which stirred the imagination, building up pictures in his hearer's mind which outdid in splendour the mere meaning of his words.

“London! London!” he exclaimed, unconsciously stretching out his hands. “I can well understand what Charles Lamb felt when he said that Fleet Street and the Strand are better places to live among than Skiddaw; and that though he could spend contentedly two or three years in the mountains, he should mope and pine away had he not the prospect of seeing London at the end of that time. Think of the men who have lived here, and the ways in which they have died.”

“Yes,” answered Lancaster, going over to the window, and standing at his side, “some of their lives are very interesting for us to look back upon, but for them they were far too actual to be pleasant. Very few of us would relive the past, I fancy, had we the chance; we know too well what it caused us to suffer. Why, the things which delight us in other men's biographies are those which were dreariest to them—accounts of their griefs and strifes. The past is a good picture to gaze back upon, Gabriel; it ought to be—it is a curio which was purchased at an extravagant price. In the meantime we have our present to mould in such fashion that it may grow into a desirable past; which proves for many of us a weariful undertaking.”

Gabriel turned sharply round, looking keenly into his

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companion's face. "Not weariful," he said, "but exciting. Think of all the scope for adventure that it affords. Any man with ten years of the future to his credit can so use his present as to make himself just whatever he likes. What would not Christ, or Julius Cæsar, or Cæsar Borgia, or John Keats have accomplished in ten more years? They would have re-made the world. I don't find the present weariful; it's grand to be alive. There are a million, million heroes in the Dead World who would exchange all their earthly triumphs for only this opportunity, which is yours and mine, of standing here in the twilight above a turbulent, modern city, and drawing a living breath."

"Perhaps; that is to say, if fools remain fools in the after-world. They would soon repent of their bargain, when once they had stepped through the shrunken streets of this sordid Babylon of ours. We have all the sins of the ancients, minus their magnificence."

"And yet," Gabriel replied, laughing, "I remain an optimist."

"Most optimists are mere unbrave pessimists who have grown terrified," returned the older man.

The attic in its remotest crannies was now in darkness. The rays of sunset, which had burnished the city's squalor with metallic splendours, were in fast retreat, following the sun, drawing in toward their eyes; so that to their wrought-up fancy the clangour of the streets resolved itself into the ring of mail-clad feet upon the roof-tops, rushing westwards. In the room itself there was no stir, save for the purring of Lancaster's pipe as he gathered long breaths of smoke through its blackened stem.

"There is truth in what you say," Gabriel answered, speaking slowly; "of late I, certainly, have been very much afraid. Perhaps, after all, I am merely a terrified pessimist."

“And that was why you came to me? Tell me about it.” A tenderer tone crept into Lancaster’s voice; all his bitterness had left him.

“Yes,” said Gabriel, turning sharply about so that he faced the darkness of the room, “that was why I came. You know how, for myself at least, I hold stern views of the purposes of life; I believe that I am in the world to save mankind.”

“That is what we are all here for.”

“Yes, but we don’t all know it, and those of us who know it don’t do it; we stickle at the price. I intend to be original in this, that, knowing my possibilities, I accept my fate.”

“Unfortunately, any departure from the conventional usually means that we impose our fate upon others; we cannot act singly.”

“I know that; I’ve been learning it during the past few days—that the accomplishment of any individual ambition must be bought with other people’s sacrifice. Good heavens! what a scoundrel of a world ours is.”

“No, say rather what a wayward child. But what has happened to make you speak like this?”

“The thing which I have most dreaded; I have had to make my choice. I’m not at home in the world, and never have been—it is all so furious and strange; I was made to feel yet more of an outsider last night. That is all.”

There followed a long pause, during which the two men hindered one another’s gaze, lest by look or spoken word they should perturb the atmosphere of confession. “I dare say you noticed that the telegram which I sent you was addressed from Marlow?” Gabriel observed slowly. “We’ve been stopping there with our house-boat, *The Pansy*, drawn up beside that of the ‘Thurms’. I’ve given my people plenty of opportunity of late for witnessing my fondness for Helen. Because of this, my father spoke to

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me last night, when the others had gone to bed, and wanted to know what plans I had made for my career. He began by saying how he counted upon my future, and had done his best to equip me to do great things in whatever I should undertake. He had spared nothing on my education, had sent me to Harrow and to Oxford, had allowed me to fulfil myself in every way, and finally, now that my 'Varsity days were at an end, he considered it only just that I should pay some attention to his wishes. He went on to say that we had always been much more than father and son to one another, and that, saving myself, he had had no intimate friend in all his years. He would like to think that this might be so always. He was a self-made man, and had never had an early opportunity for culture; whatever he had acquired in that way had been late at night, after business hours; but he had early determined that such should not be the case with me. My opportunities were commencing at just about the point where his own, after fifty years of toil, were leaving off—what was I going to do?"

"That is the question which you have been trying to avoid?"

"Yes, you know my desires, and can judge how vastly at variance they are from my father's. I hardly know how to tell you what followed, without doing him a disrespect. Well, I told him everything," Gabriel continued dreamily, visualizing the scene and recounting it in detail, as if he were living it again. "How I felt, and had always felt; that I had it in me to give expression to myself in some great way—a literary way, perhaps. At this my father was silent for a moment, and then said, 'I don't object to that. You can write all you wish, and you know that, should you succeed, no one will be more pleased than I. This will not prevent you from giving up a few hours of every day to business; and business will give you an

income, making you independent. I know that you have contrived to accumulate a valuable art-knowledge on the theoretical side, but in a large house, such as ours, if a man is ever to become an expert, it is necessary that he should come face to face with practical issues, and that as soon as possible.' What was I to say? I feel that in the mere mention I am acting disloyally to one who has always been goodness itself to me. You understand, from what I have said in previous conversations, that I cannot approve of all the methods sanctioned in the art-dealer's trade."

"I understand."

"It seems shameful to me that men should stoop to haggle and cheat one another, to set a money value and make a profit upon testaments in canvas, and in sculpture to our world's greatest ideals. The men who painted half the pictures which pass through my father's hands died in garrets of hunger and disgrace; we are content to make gain by their loss.

"This traffic in rare and beautiful articles, which is carried on under the name of art-dealing, is too often a body-snatching of a dead man's secret affections—at best it is degrading. It thrives on the purchase of fragments of the world's most precious hearts at the lowest figure, followed by an indiscriminate sale to the world's highest, and therefore most vulgar, bidder—pricing that which is priceless. If my father, like Keats' father, had been born a keeper of stables, no matter how menial his employ, provided it was honest, I would have stood by him; but his employment is not honest, and never can be."

"I hope you did not say all this to your father!"

"No, not so strongly, and I wish I hadn't said it to you, but I feel that I must speak. He was very generous and patient with me. He might have asked me how I was content to get an education with money so earned;

or how I could wear clothes bought with such money ; or where did I get the money which I carried in my pocket at that very moment. He didn't. Instead of this, he said that he had never regarded his business as anything other than honourable, nor had his clients, if their social standing counted for anything. He thought I would soon grow out of such notions, and come to see matters in a more practical light.

“Then came a worse humiliation ; in the face of my shabby treatment of him he confided in me. If he had fired up and called me an ungrateful scamp, threatened to disinherit, ordered me off his house-boat, it would have been so much easier to bear ; instead, he listened quite patiently—never uttered an angry word ; in fact, showed himself by far the greater gentleman.

“Everything had become very quiet now, all the lights had been extinguished in the other house-boats ; we two were quite alone. He laid his hand upon mine, and drew his chair nearer, saying, ‘Gabriel, I don't think you have ever realized what kind of a life your mother and I have had to lead. I should never have told you had not this occurred. A young man's agony is that he has too many ambitions ; an old man's, that he has none left. I had almost forgotten until to-night that I had ever dreamed large and impossible promises ; you have recalled all that to me. Once was the time when I would have spoken in very much the same way as you have spoken ; and, on some future day, you will speak in very much the same way as I am now going to speak. When I was a very young man, it seemed to me more than likely that I should soon become the century's greatest painter. I knew that I had the pictures in me, if I could but put them on canvas. The canvas I couldn't always buy. My father was a labouring-man. He could not have helped me, had he had the will ; he hadn't, and couldn't comprehend

the ambition. No doubt he thought me mad. I managed to tramp it up to London, and there found that I was one of a million, all of whom had at some time suffered under a similar delusion. I starved, worked at odd jobs, shovelled snow, hawked my paintings from door to door—lived as best I could. Then one day I drifted down an old street off Piccadilly, up a blind turning, known as Prejudice Alley. All this time, despite my privations, I had never lost faith in my own genius. In a corner of Prejudice Alley stood a little shop, stacked with canvases of all kinds; some good, many bad. The man who kept the shop was named Justin Redoubt. Having some of my productions with me, the idea struck me that he might be persuaded to buy; so I entered.

“Redoubt was old and dishevelled; he had once been a gentleman, but was now far gone in drink. When I entered, he was sitting at the far end of the room by an iron stove; this, when times were hard, he kept going with splinters of frames—many of them French and Florentine; the kind I sell to-day for hundreds of pounds. He had upon his knees an Italian landscape which he was frictioning with his fingers to remove the outer crust of yellow varnish. At first, he didn't want to have anything to do with me; wouldn't even so much as raise his head, but went on with his cleaning. At last, angered because I still stopped, he looked up, and seeing me, became interested. He examined what I had brought; seemed rather impressed, but put them down again, saying that he dealt only in antiques. He questioned me about myself; what I did, where I lived. After a good deal of beating about the bush, he said that he could give me employment, provided I was content to live as he lived. In the end, it turned out that this consisted in touching up, or, if you prefer the bold truth, faking original copies of the admired schools in part or whole. When a damaged

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picture came into his hands he would clean off the dirt, until he got down to the surface-paint ; then hand it over to one of the various poor artists whom he kept in his pay, to have that which had been rubbed or faded filled in, as near as possible in the master's style. Then it was returned to him, toned to a subdued colour, commensurate with its supposed age, and floated upon the market as a Raeburn, Reynolds, or Rembrandt.

“ ‘When a man is destitute and starving, neither of which you have ever been, his artistic scruples are apt to give way when food is in sight. I took Redoubt's offer, and agreed to do any work that he might set before me. I did not commit myself to the profession for ever ; I considered it only as a means to an end—the ultimate achievement of myself.

“ ‘As time went on I began to see the possible scope of this way of living, and at the same time, being always imitating the great schools, grew more expert with my brush. Where the pictures stored in Prejudice Alley all came from, I have never quite discovered ; that many of them were the results of theft, I am now convinced.

“ ‘London is the clearing-house of the world's ill-gained artistic treasures. There are, probably, this night stowed away in various back-streets and hovels of London more great masterpieces than are contained in the Prado or the Hermitage. If you could follow up the hidden history of the master-canvases of Italy and Spain which have disappeared, and come to light again years later when their loss was nearly forgotten, you would almost invariably find that at some period in their wanderings they have come to London. If they have not done so yet, they soon will.

“ ‘What Mecca is to the Mohammedan, that London is to the art-treasure ; there is an unexplained fatality in these matters. Some few broken men, living in the

slums of the Italian quarter around Soho, have seized upon this piece of information, and watch all channels of entry night and day. Such an one was Redoubt.

““After a short residence with him, I commenced to apprehend the immense importance of the knowledge which I was acquiring. I set myself to wondering in what way I might make use of it. All this must sound very sordid to your ears, fresh as you are from the city of romance ; yet there has never attached to Oxford one-tenth part of the romance which there was packed away in that one dusty room, disorderly with frames and tattered canvas, down Prejudice Alley. Why, every picture had a legend, and many had been purchased with blood.

““At the end of four years I decided to set up for myself. Your mother was Justin Redoubt's daughter, and, having been brought up in the shop, was not only a splendid judge of schools, periods, and artists' styles, but also one of the most delicate restorers in the profession. I determined to keep the entire undertaking in my own hands, your mother and I working together. I purchased for myself, restored for myself, and was my own runner. Then, when I discovered that pictures bought from me for twenty pounds were sold by the dealers for hundreds and thousands, I made up my mind to become a West-End dealer, and saved up money to that end. By dint of hard work and pinched living, I opened a studio in Piccadilly. From that time I prospered.

““During my early struggles, I still retained my first ambition, to express myself to the world—to paint. But when I met so many men of kindred illusion, and saw how they had failed, by slow degrees I abandoned myself to the fortune which came to me unbidden, and forsook the fortune which I had only coveted.

““Then you came to us, and all was changed. I determined that no child of mine should ever undergo the

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scorn of poverty to which I had been subjected. What had previously been a selfish toil, solely for my own ends, now grew into a work of love for yours.

“‘I have read in some stray book, which I once chanced to pick up, words which run something like this: “Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.”

“‘I am one of those who have fought and lost the battle. Without being in any way a cynic, that is, I believe, what every man is doing. No man ever attains that which he sets out to attain; he attains something, never that. Friends, who encourage a young man in the belief that he will attain, are but false friends, goading him on to a hell of his own making. The unkindest thing that a father can do for his boy is to shout him forward in the pursuit of his early will-o'-the-wisps. I believe that every life has its own peculiar victory in store—it is never the victory which the possessor of that life has most desired. Disillusion is man's greatest triumph, and conquest in the unsought skirmish a greater test of courage than the brutal winning of a long and cunningly thought-out campaign. Every foremost man has experienced this; at the back of every peace there is some hidden desolation. There is no enthroned genius of to-day who does not regret a visionary and lost battlefield of yesterday. Tennyson succeeds as a poet, but is miserable because he cannot write a staging play. Some applauded playwright is wretched because he cannot make his scribbled verses scan.

“‘I speak to you out of my Book of Life—the only trustworthy guide-book to which a father can refer his son. I set out to be a Raphael—I am only a millionaire; and I say to you with all kindness that, if you persist

in your present fancy, it will be without my aid. I believe that you are one of the men who will succeed, and that greatly, but it is not in the way which now you most desire.’”

While listening to this story of revolt against the things that be, Lancaster had been reading it through with the stifled yearnings of his own early life. His experience of battles bitterly corroborated that of Gabriel’s father—that fights are fought to be lost. It had always been so in his own case. Nevertheless, to-night, in the presence of this incarnation of youth, he crushed down experience, and hoped against hope.

“And then,” asked Lancaster, “and after that what did you say?”

“What could I say? I could not tell him that this account of his methods had made my partaking in the business all the more repellent; that the very handling of money so gained was in itself contamination. So I simply said, ‘Well, father, we shall see. For the present I am determined, at every cost, to follow my own bent, and to attempt that which I feel myself most capable to attain.’”

“This sounded very lame and very obstinate, I’m afraid; but I dared not tell him my deeper reason. I don’t think he had expected me to take matters so seriously. His eyes filled, and he said, ‘My boy, you know best, but I had hoped that it might have been otherwise. You are my only child; I and your mother are growing old. You will have to come at wisdom in your own way, and I pray God it may not cost you as much as it has already cost me.’”

“He said this with a sob in his voice. The morning was breaking when we rose to go. Somehow, in that grey light, he looked older than I had ever seen him, and his shoulders seemed to have fallen forward. I feel that I behaved badly in speaking as I did, and even though it

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was the truth, I am half-inclined to go back to him and give myself the lie.

“To-day we talked over other matters—Helen amongst others, and then I said that I should like to run up and see you. I think that is all. Now, what have you to say?”

The world outside had been for some time quite dark. The noise of traffic had subsided; everything was very silent, with that intensest quiet which can only be found in a great city, when, for the short hour or two which precede the dawn, all memory of work has ebbed away.

“I think, Gabriel, that you have acted in a way which, for most men, would be reckoned unwise—a way, however, which was the only one possible to you. I neither praise nor condemn the step which you have taken; but I love you because of it. While you have been speaking, I have been thinking out how you are to support yourself for the first few months. Your action with regard to your father, and the stand which he has taken, will, if I know anything of your resources, place you in a very embarrassing position for the next year or so. You are my friend, therefore you need not feel sorry to accept from me. I am not rich, but I am quite comfortably off, and I want to say that you are not only welcome to stay with me for a year or two, but positively must. I have failed myself, you must remember, and I do not intend to see you fail.

“About your literary projects we will talk more to-morrow; you are fagged out with the excitements of the day and must go to bed now. Get off as quickly as you can, and try to forget your troubles for a while. So now, good-night.”

Gabriel went softly over to where Lancaster sat. At this hour, when so many affections threatened to vanish out of life, he had met with utter comprehension; a wave of tenderness swept over him. Placing his hands upon

his shoulders, he stood above him, looking down into his face. "You are a brave fellow," he said, "and have given me courage; I don't think that you have really failed."

Long after Gabriel had departed, Lancaster stayed on sitting by the open window, thinking, thinking. A bedraggled rooster, in some neighbouring Turnpike slum, lifted up his voice on stilts out of the blackness, heralding the approach of light.

"Be careful, my fine fellow," Lancaster muttered; "even though you are somewhat of a prophet and have discovered the dawn to which men as yet are blind, they'll wring your neck for you to-morrow if you make too much noise."

He smiled bitterly, fancying that he found a parallel between this and another, no very distant, case.

The footsteps of new day had commenced to sound before he rose to go to rest.

CHAPTER II

THE EXPENSE OF AMBITION

THEY rose late next morning. The boy who looked after the shop had already taken down the shutters, and the woman who came to tidy and arrange the rooms had already gone before they sat down to breakfast. Gabriel, except for a slight pallor, looked fresh and moderately happy ; but Lancaster's eyes were heavy and ringed.

After a display of emotion between two men, especially if they happen to be Englishmen, there is usually a certain awkwardness. Of nothing are we more afraid, either in ourselves or others, than the revelation of that true self which lies hidden beneath the actor's guise.

After a few minutes of embarrassed silence, Gabriel nervously, and with a forced hilarity, began, "I'm afraid I was rather overstrung last night, and overmuch in earnest. I don't believe any one is capable of giving an accurate judgment on a situation after the sun has gone down. With sunset vitality decreases, and men are apt to become cowards—to see only dreary probabilities in a crisis. I must beg your pardon for upsetting you in the way I did."

Lancaster raised his eyes very slowly. "My dear boy, I don't see that there is any need for apology or explanation. You were only loyal to yourself; the cowardice consists in being ashamed of having been loyal."

There was a pause, during which Gabriel flushed, and

then said impulsively, "What a fellow you are, John! You always seem to know what it is that a man really wants to say, even though he belies himself in the saying of it. There's no good in disguise. My affairs are in a very delicate state. I have either to be false to my father or to myself; and it seems to me that if a man parleys with his environment at twenty-two, by the time he has reached forty his environment will be piloting his destiny. A man's first duty is at all costs to attain himself. Most tragedies arise from an early omission of this step."

"And it is because of this, and more especially when I look back into my own past and see the lack of that early step, that I am so emphatic in my advice to you to follow up your present inclination. No man can serve two masters; he must either submit to his own fate, or inherit some one else's. I did the latter at your age in adopting my father's business; my father's business has now adopted me. I have been trying to repair the damage ever since. I have found that the most expensive thing to repurchase is your past. I should be sorry to see you understudying for my catastrophe. But there—we don't want to be tragic. You are trying a novel experiment, one which few men have tried—the experiment of being yourself—and I believe you'll win in the end. What we've got to do is to plan for the clearing of a way. In the first place, there's Helen Thurm."

"I think I've told you nearly everything about myself except that. One doesn't like to talk about the woman he loves—at least, I don't. It seems a sort of sacrilege. You have met both Helen and her brother; but I have never liked to discuss either of them, and you have always seemed to understand and respect my reserve. Rupert and I have been close friends all through college. I met his sister in my first year, when she was up for Eights' week, and have been meeting her off and on ever since.

“Her social status, as such things are reckoned, is, of course, vastly superior to my own, and at first I thought that this would stand in my way. I used to fancy that she rather despised our family occupation—not so much from what she actually said as from the way in which she kept silent, treating me on and off with a flippant disdain. It was not until we took the *Pansy* to Marlow this summer that I had any hope. But after she had got to know my father and mother, she seemed to change. You know how simple and lovable they both are, for all their money, and how timid mother still is amongst strangers—almost as though she was always harking back with longing to the struggling days, when no one stood between us and herself, and she had to work hard and do everything for us with her own two hands. I think Helen expected to meet some newly-rich and vulgar folk, who had nothing to boast of or live for save their wealth. Instead, she found two quiet old people who cared nothing about anything or anybody except for loving one another and their son.”

“Of course, you must see, Gabriel, that in making yourself penniless, it would not be just to handicap the fortunes of a brilliant young girl. Literature is a very precarious adventure, and, even when it proves successful, is not a prosperous financial investment.”

“I see that only too clearly, and intend to let her know, before I go any further, the reasons for my step, also that I consider her entirely free. I’m afraid she’ll despise me very much; but I can’t help that. I would rather be despised by the person I love most than live to despise myself. I have been thinking the matter out, and have decided to run down to Marlow this afternoon and stop the night with Rupert, so as to let him know the exact reason for what I am doing. I shall also see father, and persuade him not to take me too seriously. I should be miserable if he were to understand my going away as

tantamount to a family rupture. I begin to feel that we have all regarded this small affair as far too epoch-making. It is, after all, only a little *wanderjahr* into a virtuous far country, which is not so distant but what a penny 'bus-fare will bring me back any day. Carlyle has been there, and Coleridge, and even the pompous Dr. Johnson ; so I shall be in respectable company, even though there is nothing but husks to feed upon."

* * * * *

That evening Gabriel found himself again in Marlow. He had thought his way, at least partially, through his difficulties, and was now rather inclined to smile upon the strained perplexity of mind which had driven him so suddenly up to town.

The long stretch of silver river seemed to reflect his mood, recalling him from perfervid effort and speaking of the ultimate happiness of quietude. A boatman informed him that his father's house-boat had moved up-stream early that morning, but that that of the 'Thurms' was still in the old place. After walking a mile or so towards it, he cast himself upon the bank in the golden evening light, and abandoned himself to dreaming those long, vague dreams of which only very young men are capable. As he lay there he did not notice how a long, slim punt, which had edged its way out from a back-water upon the further side, came drifting towards him, pushing through the rushes, keeping close to the shore. His eyes were in a more distant land. He was now far enough removed from the brutal realities of London to find attainment of any kind easy. He pictured himself as a youth who has walked all his years across a monotony of prairie, who comes at last to a high precipice, and, looking down, descries rivers and towers and golden cities, things unheard of and unimagined, any one of which may be his for the asking.

"That's just the trouble with me," he said, speaking

aloud. "There are so many of them that I don't know which to choose, they are all so lovely; but since I've already clambered part way down the cliff, soon I shall have to make my decision."

"Gabriel!" exclaimed a rich contralto voice. "I thought that it must be you."

Turning round suddenly and rising to his feet, he saw a tall, handsome girl, hatless, with a mass of chestnut hair coiled above a smiling, sunburnt face. She was dressed in white, and stood upon the stern of a punt, steadying herself with the pole which was in her hands. "I knew that I could not be mistaken; I thought that it must be you," she said again.

"Why, Helen, what instinct made you come to meet me?" he replied. "I've just returned from London, and was coming to visit you and Rupert. I had hoped to see my father at the same time. He went up-stream in the *Pansy* early this morning, so I'm told."

"Yes. Mr. Garrod grew tired of Marlow after your departure. He didn't know that you intended to come back again; so he took his house-boat up-river. Yesterday Rupert was summoned to 'The Castles' to look after a sale of land. I am expecting him back by the 6.30 train. I thought that he would walk from the station along the river-bank, so I punted up to meet him half-way. I suppose he must have driven by the road; for if he had walked, he would have been here by now. You had better get in the punt and come back with me. He'll be waiting dinner for us."

Gabriel stepped in and took the pole, while she lay down upon the cushions, looking towards him. When he had pushed out from the bank and they were under way, he asked her shyly, turning his face aside, "Have you heard anything of what took place between my father and myself? Yes? Then that saves a lot of explanation. I

want to do something that will really avail. Father, when he was young, thought to do something of the same kind, but he was never given his chance; so he has come to think that no man ever gets the chance he is in search of, and that the cruelest thing that he could do would be to encourage me in my quest. What it all amounts to is this, that without having in any way quarrelled, we have decided that it is best—at least, for a time—that he should go his way and I mine—which means that I am penniless.”

“You don’t look very unhappy about it.”

“No, I am not unhappy. I am uncomfortable, because I feel upon my life the pressure of other men’s lives. I long to remain free. I dread giving hostages to *things-as-they-are*. I don’t approve of *things-as-they-are*, and intend to say so to the world—not that I suppose for a minute that the careless world will mind. Nevertheless, at the outset, I want to be honest, and therefore refuse to be gagged. If I obeyed my father’s wishes, I should be bound and gagged and blinded from now till the end of time. I long to be able to fulfil myself in those ways which I know to be best. Every man has it in himself to become a god if he will only maintain his soul unfettered. To do this, even for the sake of others, means that others have to pay a part of the price; for instance, my father and my mother. That is my problem. Am I justified in imposing the sacrifice? and, after it has been suffered by others, shall I find myself strong enough to do those deeds which will make their suffering worth while? However, when you found me just now I had been thinking how foolish it is to fret and worry over the coming days. Every next step and new decision is a step into the darkness. We shan’t make night any less black by groaning and crying about it.”

“That is practically what Epicurus says: ‘A foolish life is restless and disagreeable; it is wholly engrossed with

the future. He who is least in need of the morrow will meet the morrow most pleasantly.’”

“Why, this is a discovery! I never knew that you took interest in such philosophies.”

“No, I dare say not. Unfortunately, the wise man is for ever inclined to endow his neighbour with surpassing folly. Because few words are uttered, it does not always follow that nothing is thought. When you discover some one who appears to you to be dumb, first doubt your own power of hearing—only after a long lapse of time his power of speech.”

He allowed the punt to drift, and regarded her intently. “I have always envied you your assurance in confronting the world,” he said. “You give the impression of possessing everybody and everything with which you come in contact. Surely you are not unhappy?”

She raised herself up from the cushions and answered him slowly. “I suppose if you were discussing me with a man you would sit down and count up the list of blessings wherefore I should be truly thankful? ‘She has plenty of money,’ you would say; ‘She’s rather good-looking’ (I know that I am not ugly; I’m quite frank with myself in confessing that); ‘She’s an orphan, and is not troubled with female relatives;’ ‘She’s well connected, and owns a thousand acres;’ ‘She can sing a little, paint a little, play a little.’ And so you would go on. You would never see that all these recommendations with which you had been crediting me are either borrowed from outside myself or mediocre. Do you think that because I am a girl I also have no impossible fantastic dreams and wild, uncurbed desires? I envy you your freedom of choice. I wonder what people would say of me were I to pluck the reins of my life from out the hands of convention, as you are doing, and gallop away and away in the direction which my soul thinks best?”

She bent forward, resting her face within her hands, looking far up the windings of the river, as if to see some image of the things of which she spoke. "Don't you see, Gabriel, how humiliating it is to be a rich, well-connected, good-looking girl? People are so contented with all that you are that they never take the trouble to think of the greatness that you might become. You envy me my assurance! That is a part of my inheritance, and not of my own begetting. And you presuppose that I am happy—you, who are so wrapped up in your own emotions that sometimes you have not even credited other people with feelings."

Then, perceiving that she had spoken more forcibly than she had intended, "Why, Gabriel, a man of your taste ought to know that it is no longer fashionable to be happy. Rossetti altered all that when he painted his 'Beata Beatrix' and penned 'The Blessed Damozel.'" She looked up at him sideways, trying to smile; but a tear, which had launched forth unawares, had shipwrecked in the long lashes of her eyes, bespeaking misery.

He drew in the pole and sat down in the stern, waiting for her to speak again. The sun had set and the land had grown quiet. At last he said, "Helen, I think I have never known you until this moment. We have been very much together of late, yet you have never uttered yourself."

"Have you not heard of the heart's key, Gabriel? Men and women live together, and love together, and grow tired of one another together, yet never recognize their essential selves, because they have mislaid the key."

As at times hearts are broken because few words are spoken, so there are seasons when they are desecrated by over-speech. In silence they floated down the shadowy stream, sitting face to face, watching the mystery which looked out from one another's eyes. Rounding a bend in

the river, the house-boat came in sight. Unwillingly Gabriel arose and brought the punt alongside. On stepping out, Helen inquired for her brother, and learnt, to her surprise, that he had not arrived. There was still another train which he might come by, but since it was not due for an hour, they determined to commence dinner without him.

Following Helen into the cabin, he felt to the full all the comfort which he was about to forsake. Everything bespoke luxury and a woman's presence; from the old Staffordshire china upon the table to the pink-and-white curtains at the window, and the careful array of geraniums and ferns upon the sills.

She dismissed the waiter, telling him that he would not be required; and so they two were left quite alone. The subtle sense of proprietorship in a woman began to take possession of him, so that, in the long, unbroken silence which followed, he noted her every charm; the delicate curve of her wrist when she raised it; each long and slender finger with its pink climax; the golden glint in her hair, where the sun's rays had gathered and left their stain; the rustle of her dress, and the slow rise and fall of her breast—all of which were so intensely feminine, and yet so ill-appreciated in times past.

She looked up and met his gaze, blushing. "It isn't very often that two people are really quite alone together, do you think? I've often thought how strange it is that I spend hours and hours in Rupert's company, and yet never seem to know him any better. When we were little children and had nothing to say, we told one another everything; now that we are older, and would give years of our life to speak out our hearts, the power of speech is gone from us. Have you ever felt like that?"

"Yes, all this summer. Every time I have been with you, except this time."

“Why this time? I think it is because you are in trouble, and have something to tell me; because I am unhappy, and feel the need of you.”

“Yes, life has been too happy. I knew that it could not last; but if this is unhappiness, I am content.”

“And I.”

The rest of the dinner took place without speech of words.

A slight wind had blown up, ruffling the water, and puffing out the curtains like sails. Except for this, there was no sound. They pushed back their chairs.

“I shall always remember you, when you are gone,” she said softly.

“When I am gone? Why, I shan’t be far away, and, if you will let me, I shall soon come back to you—when I have succeeded.”

“No, I think not,” she replied. “This is our last night together. You will find many other interests when you are gone out into the great world of your own making; and one day, when you are famous, you will look back and smile at this night, thinking how foolish it was. But I shall always remember.”

“I came to tell you something quite different from that. I came to tell you——”

She raised her hand. “Yes, dear, I know what you came to tell me, but that could never be. In ordinary men faithfulness is a virtue; in the artist it is a vice. The highest fidelity is to grow with your ideal, and of this artists alone are fully capable; but it is bitterly severe on the women they have loved. You will outgrow me, and remember only my faults. How I was haughty, and reserved, and quick-tempered, and gave myself away quite unbecomingly once long ago on a summer’s night.”

“No, Helen, I swear to you that nothing of what you say shall ever come true. I would willingly give up the

little art which now I think that I have, rather than lose the hope of winning you."

"You say so now, and I admire and love you for saying it; but, should I hold you to the word which you have spoken, the day would come when you would review your abandoned career. Then you would blame me, and yet more grievously yourself, for the sacrifice of a lifetime; a sacrifice which had been made in an hour of boyish enthusiasm."

"But everything is not final. I shall come back."

"No man ever comes back. Women do sometimes; men never."

Outside the wind sighed through the trees, and some few drops of rain were heard to patter amongst the leaves. Already there was a foreboding of autumn abroad. The moon tottered as one already tired; small dissevered clouds were drifting down the sky, as petals which fall in a garden when flowers begin to fade.

"You have told me of your future hopes, let me tell you of mine which are past. You know how it was with mother? She was a professional singer, and father, in making her his wife, was supposed to have married beneath him. Shortly after the marriage, he tried to make amends for his social error by strictly forbidding her ever to sing again. He had fallen in love at the first not with her, but with her voice—at that time he had not seen her face. He used to wait at night outside the high-walled garden of the house in which she lived, in order that he might listen to her singing.

"When at his bidding she ceased to sing, he gave up caring for her. You can imagine how pitiful her position was! She loved him passionately, and knew that she could win him back to her any day, if she should sing only one of those old songs which he had first heard her sing. But she was too honourable, and hated her voice

as the agent which had brought about his family disgrace. Sometimes, when I was a little girl, she would send me to sleep with snatches of lullabies ; and on nights when every one was abed, and papa was away from home, I would wake in my cot, and hear her singing one wailing refrain over and over. Once, I crept out of bed and down to the room, and found her at the piano, crying in the dark as she sang. That was just before she died.

“As a child I always hoped to be something greater and better than the average woman of my class, and, in excess of all other desires, coveted the power of song. One can say so much more, and come so much closer to the hearts of others, when one sings the meaning. Words are such a clumsy contrivance for expressing thought, they leave so much room for misunderstanding ; music speaks nothing that is not true. When I grew older and became a young girl, I would often kneel, praying with an agony of intensity far into the night that I might sing, till the cold ate into my bones, and almost paralyzed my lips. The day came when I discovered that I had dreamed true. Herr Emile, who was at that time the greatest tenor in Europe, having heard me sing, promised that, should he have the training of me, I should become a great contralto. Day in and day out I practised ; going from Germany to France, from France to Italy, and last of all to Vienna. Whilst there I had diphtheria, and, when I recovered, found that only a little portion of all my talent remained—that I should never be a great singer after all, only a trifling drawing-room amateur. I made up my mind never to sing again, and forbade any one to make mention of what had gone before. I became embittered and cynical, and fell back for comfort upon my social position and wealth, although I despised them both. About this time there came to me a certain poet who was old and broken in body, though in years he still was young. He

also had spent his powers in the search after something which he had never realized. He said that he found in me that for which he had sought. For him it may have been true; but for me he had come too late. He had lost all his beauty and health and idealism along the road towards his goal; when he arrived, I could only be sorry for him. I broke his heart with my pity. Isn't it strange, Gabriel, that a good woman can work as much ruin with her pity as a bad woman with her hate?

"After these things I met with you. Then I struggled against my change of heart, and grew jealous of your courage and ambition. I was miserably lonely. All that is now over; for this one night I am content to say that I love you."

While she had been speaking, Gabriel had risen from his chair and knelt beside her. Now that she was silent, he placed his arms around her neck and, drawing her face towards his own, kissed her upon the lips.

Outside the storm had gathered, and the rain drove across the countryside like an invading and victorious host; but they were unconscious of the storm. The light of the moon was obscured, and the room in darkness. He felt a hot tear splash upon his hand, and found that her cheeks were wet with crying.

She rose and sat herself at the piano, saying, "This is the song which mother used to sing, when I was a little child."

In a low, sweet voice, which trembled with emotion, she sang—

"When my love was nigh me,
Naught had I to say,
Then I feigned a false love,
And turned my lips away.

When my love lay dying,
Sorrowing I said,
'Soon shall I wear scarlet
Because my love is dead.'

When my love had vanished,
Then was nothing said ;
I forgot the scarlet
For tears—and bowed my head.”

The wind blowing into the room bore with it a crumpled leaf of geranium which lighted in her bosom. Picking up the reddened petal, she tried to smile, whispering, “Scarlet, see, it is scarlet !”

“Darling,” said Gabriel, in a choking voice, “I shall go out into the world, and do great things for you, and come back.”

“No man ever comes back,” she reiterated, sighing. “We have spoken to one another face to face, as it is given to few men and women to speak. To-morrow we might meet, and, being less noble, repent of that which we have done and said to-night. The penalty of all ecstasy is that it leads us to expect too much of one another. Should we meet again in the blatant daylight commonplace, we should earnestly search after those two people who were here to-night, and should search in vain.”

He would not deny her, for he knew too well that at such a time denial would be vain ; moreover, he felt within his heart that there was truth in what she said. But he took her in his arms, pressing her close, so that at last he could feel the panting of her bosom, and the touch of her hair upon his face.

“You will go away and forget me,” she cried. “But I want you to be great, and strong, and good. Success is useless unless it helps others to succeed. I shall always remember and pray for you.”

She broke from him suddenly ; and he, running to the door to recapture her, heard the swish of her dress, and the hastening of her retreating footsteps in the passage—and the clang of a closed door.

Covering his face with his hands, he stole out from the

house-boat and fled into the night. Running along the river-side, frightened and unnerved, he flung himself down in the wet, fragrant grass, whispering brokenly, "What have I done? Oh, what have I done?"

How long he lay there he never could tell. When he came to himself, staggering to his feet, he stumbled his way toward the high-road. A farmer's wagon, which was thundering on its way to the Saturday market at the town of Windsor, halted as he tottered through the hedge. The driver flashed his lantern into Gabriel's face, and, seeing that he was a gentleman in distress, with that superior and indiscriminating compassion which those who are honourably denominated "the working-classes" invariably show to the wretched of whatsoever walk of life, told him whither he was bound, and offered him a lift.

With a scarcely audible "Thank you," Gabriel clambered into the wagon, and was soon asleep, snuggled in a bed of new-mown hay. The farmer, perceiving that his passenger was wet, stripped off his coat, threw it over him, and went whistling on his way.

When Gabriel awoke, the sun was shining in, and the clocks of Windsor were striking six. The driver was stooping over him, shaking him by the shoulder, trying to arouse him.

Tumbling out of the wagon, stiff and dizzy, he found his way to the railway station, and took a ticket on the early train to London.

CHAPTER III

SANITY AND THE MORNING

By the time that the train rolled into Paddington Gabriel had recovered his calm of mind. The deep sleep of utter weariness which had overtaken him in the wagon had restored his sanity, and the brisk, early morning air, washed pure by rain, acted like a tonic.

Leaving the station, he walked down Westbourne Terrace into the Uxbridge Road, and took an outside seat upon a 'bus going eastward to the Turnpike.

The panorama of London was already in full swing: Hyde Park, with its ceaseless processional of tidy and slatternly nursemaids, its top-hatted and black-coated masquerade of well-groomed men out for an aimless constitutional; Oxford Street, with its arrogant display of wealth on the pavement and impotent poverty on the kerb-stone. Here he caught sight, in passing, of one of his father's sumptuous branch establishments, and a recently-purchased Turner in the window, which had cost sufficient to maintain a family in luxury for a lifetime. It filled him with dull anger. At Regent Circus a tattered ragamuffin of a news-boy, climbing on to the 'bus, flashed before his eyes the announcement, "Garrod pays fabulous price for old tapestry." This served to prove to him how far he had drifted from his accustomed bearings. He saw the headlines without interest, save for a certain sense of shame, and indolently returned his regard to the street.

Holborn was past, and Newgate, where, he had been informed by the driver, "A bloke was to be 'ung for an 'orrid hatrawcity." The Mansion House was reached, and, last of all, they swung into the Turnpike. Here, where the patient and uncleanly poor are scourged and crucified daily in all their nobility, he thanked his God that the West was left behind. Here were poems of transition to be captured, and tragedies of decay to be portrayed; out of his own misfortune the true dignity of poverty was made known to him. Somehow the journey had seemed symbolic of his life; from rich to poor, from the artificial to the real; and yet he felt happy.

At the far end of the street he saw the old wooden sign, which hung before Lancaster's door, swinging to and fro in the sunlight, blotched and blurred with centuries of abusive weather, but still defiantly bearing the effigy of a woman, robed in scarlet, carrying a child, and weeping as though her heart would break.

To his strained fancy the rude outline resembled Helen. He snatched his gaze away convulsively, determined not to see; and yet was increasingly conscious of its presence. Now and then, as he approached, he was constrained to glance stealthily from under his drooping lids, and each time thought he caught the woman regarding him with Helen's eyes; but, when he turned savagely toward it, he found nothing save the crude daub of a woman with a mantled head.

"Nerves," he said, and, descending from the 'bus, alighted before the door. Lancaster, who had evidently been on the watch, hastened to meet him as he crossed the threshold with welcoming hands.

"There is a letter up-stairs for you," he said; "I fancy it's from your father."

On ascending to the sitting-room, he eagerly possessed himself of his letter, which he found to be a brief summary

of what had gone before, stating that his father in no way blamed him for his choice, although he might be grieved. He had already given his reasons as to why he could not give his son an allowance during his experiment, but he enclosed a cheque for fifty pounds, to cover immediate expenses. He thought it best for both their sakes that no meeting between them should take place for a twelvemonth, in order that Gabriel might have opportunity to prove the value of his decision. He wished him clearly to understand that, should he feel inclined to revoke and come back to the old mode of life at any time within the year, he would be welcomed, and no mention would be made of what had occurred. Finally, he wished him God-speed, and would pray continually for his happiness.

Enclosed was a little tearful note from his mother, brimming over with love, attempting loyally at one and the same time to explain away any apparent harshness in her husband's conduct, and to make it evident that she in no way censured her son. Then followed a page of tender mother-advice to a son who was supposed to be more ignorant than she of the wickedness of the world—a pathetic superstition common to most mothers. Then a brief reminiscence or two of his childish sayings; a prayer for his speedy return; and a row of straggling kisses—the last desperate endeavour of bruised and separated hearts to make their meaning plain.

Lancaster, who had been watching Gabriel's face while he read, now courteously turned his back and commenced to rummage with unnecessary energy among a pile of papers. Gabriel raised the two letters to his lips. Then, going toward Lancaster, asked him for a match, and was about to set fire to the cheque.

"What are you doing?" asked Lancaster, swinging sharply around at the sound of the ignition.

"I'm going to burn this."

"What is it?"

"A cheque for fifty pounds from my father."

"How much money have you got of your own?"

"Twenty or so."

"Then you'll make a great mistake if you destroy that."

"Why?"

"Because you never know when it may come in handy. Suppose you were taken ill?"

"There are plenty of free hospitals."

"Don't be foolish, Gabriel. Ideals, like everything else, must be paid for. There is nothing which has not to be purchased in our day. Youth, which is the despiser of wealth, can only afford to be young so long as it has the run of a father's banking-account."

"As for my ideals, I paid for them last night. And as for my youth, if available capital is the basis of reckoning, I must be about a hundred, for I haven't any."

Lancaster came over to him, took his hands between his own, and looked into his eyes, saying, "You know very well that whatever I have is yours, and that you are free to live in my house just so long as you like; but you never know what may happen. You must keep that cheque. You may not cash it at present, perhaps, but you must keep it. If you burn it, you will insult your father's kindness."

"I was thinking that he had insulted me by sending it," Gabriel began weakly; and then, seeing the look of pain on his friend's face, added, "No, you are right, John. You always are. I am acting like a petulant, ill-bred, little boy. You must forgive me. I feel as though I ought to write and beg my father's pardon for what I have just said."

"I wouldn't do that. He wasn't present and wouldn't understand. I generally find that silence is the best policy, the most sincere, and the most acceptable. You must

make amends by doing something. Speech is the I O U of the spendthrift; deeds are the bullion of honourable men. If you wish to repay your father's kindness, you must approve your choice and get to work. Have you got any further with your plans?"

"Yes, I want to tell you all about them."

"I also have plans which I wish to talk over with you,—things which I couldn't confide before because they were not my exclusive property."

"Can't you knock off business for to-day, and come out into the country? After all, it is Saturday."

"Well, then, to commemorate your new departure and mine (which you don't yet know about), I will."

CHAPTER IV

A FLIGHT TO THE FOREST

IF it be true that all good Americans go to Paris when they die, it is equally certain that the Elysian Fields of the pious Londoner stretch Epping-wards. Perhaps there is no one place in England where class distinctions and aristocratic snobbery fade so utterly out of sight, where rich and poor are free to walk and mingle in such good comradeship, and, in fact, where all those brotherly and unconventional virtues, which we are wont to admire and banish to a better world, come so near to earth, as in the catholic glades of Epping Forest. It is as though an Englishman, on entering the greenwood, recaught the jolly echo of the far-off days when Robin Hood (whose sacred memory is preserved in the name of many a neighbouring roadside inn), surrounded by his bowmen, stole between the huge-boled trees, preaching in secret places, in his own peculiar way, that fond and never-to-be-forgotten dream of down-trodden men, the Equality of Man. Robin Hood, and John Ball, and Jack Straw, and Wat Tyler, have long since mouldered into nothingness upon the barricades of a lost cause, but a whisper of their generous gospel still lingers in the royal domain which they once trespassed, making glad the heart of the cockney, whether coster or noble, whensoever he enters its preserves.

Here it was, after the usual elaborate discussion, which may be heard in almost any London thoroughfare upon

almost any Saturday in the year, as to "where shall we go," and with a like result, that they ultimately came—to the Forest.

Alighting at Chingford, they set off at a rambling gait in the direction of Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge; then, turning sharply to the left, struck out through Hawk Wood toward High Beech.

A hundred yards from the roadway solitude was reached. The coster and his donkey, the excursionist, cyclist, the Harry and Harriet, whether from fear of the forest or out of preference for that to which they have become most accustomed, never forsake the macadam track. Within twelve miles of the Mansion House the moil and toil of a tortured city may be forgotten, and a quiet, as primal as any of that first Garden, is attained.

Lancaster was the first to speak. "Whenever I come here I feel as light-hearted as if I had never known the worry of a pettifogging little one-horse show in the Turnpike. When the sun is shining and the birds are singing, it seems impossible that any man ever believed that there were such things as sorrow and death in the world."

"No man ever does really believe in death until he himself comes to die; or in sorrow, until he himself becomes a derelict. Mercifully every man is so much of an egoist that he can discover nothing in the world around him but miniature editions of his own prosperous self—he being the *Edition de Luxe*."

"I don't see where the mercy comes in when that particular man happens himself to be a *misérable*."

"For him there is a fresh grace prepared—that man is an irrational animal and adapts his logic to his condition. Therefore God is good."

"Not so good as we make Him, yet much better than He seems."

"How do you make that out?" Gabriel had never

conversed with Lancaster upon religious topics and was therefore interested.

“When I say that God is not so good as we make Him, I mean as the professional flatterers of Divinity make Him, who stand up every first day to fawn, and cringe, and extend their hands, with fulsome praises, planned upon the oriental pattern, whilst abject fear dominates their entire mental attitude, to One whom they are pleased to call the All-wise and the All-good. Why, there isn’t a single man, woman, or child in their audience who would be hood-winked by such insincerity, if it were addressed to them! The first question they would ask would be, ‘What does he want?’

“I often think that God must be very glad of the atheists; they at least are frank in telling Him that they are not sure as to whether He exists. Personally, I know that, if I were God, I should get very tired of attending public worship. For the sake of my own self-respect, I should try to forget that there was a Sabbath.”

“But what do you mean when you say that God is better than He seems?”

“When I say that He is much better than He seems, I mean that when you come down to men as they are, and look for God in the lowest haunts of a great city, you are astonished at how splendid He can be.”

“I didn’t know that you took much interest in the *gone-under*.”

“No one can live for so long as I have in the East End of London without either submerging his soul in a degrading apathy, or trying to do something positive, so far as in him lies, to relieve the suffering.”

“Have you done anything?”

“Much less than I ought, but yet a little.”

“In what direction?”

“That is the subject I want to speak to you about.

You know how discouraged I have been, and side-tracked by fate. At one time I was in precisely the same position as yourself—full of intensest longings which I only half-understood, desires to do something great and tangible, and hopes that I might perhaps touch the lives of others through the pen. The literary ambition is, I fancy, in the long run very much of a delusion. Even the greatest and most popular writer must often lapse into despair, when he discovers how few of all the great thoughts which he has cherished have been given expression; and when they have been expressed, how lame and palsied they appear in the multitude's eyes. Nevertheless, such delusive dreams mark the glorious triumph days of a man's life—there are none like them. Whenever I am thoroughly unhappy, and find myself and my surroundings quite unendurable, I close my eyes, telling myself that I am twenty again, and straightway wander back through the woods of my banished ambitions, once more confident of the truth of my own assertions, to a place where it is only necessary to imagine to realize, to seek to find, to knock for the door to be already opened.

“In those days religion was very necessary to me. I did nothing, thought nothing, hoped nothing, in which it had not a part. Religion is like a boy's voice, it breaks before manhood, and no one ever can tell whether it will come back as tenor or bass—still less whether it will retain its singing quality; the boy himself least of all. Mine must have sunk to a low octave, for of all my trills and tremoloes I can now only recapture an occasional desperate clinging to Christ.

“How things fell out with me at my father's death you know. My mother and sisters had to be supported, and I did not feel myself justified in imperilling their means of livelihood, as well as my own, by selling up the business, and following my direct call. I just settled down at the

Turnpike, and have been there ever since. At first I persuaded myself that these desires were only postponed, that I should be able to gratify them of evenings; like nine-tenths of Man's capitulations with his soul, the truce became a treaty, and the treaty a peace. I grew embittered and taciturn; since that time you are the only man who has been given the latch-key to my mind.

"During the last year, however, a change has come, which you may have noticed?"

"Yes, I have often wondered what may have been its cause. You were always generous to me, but now you are kinder to everybody, and altogether more gentle."

"Well, Gabriel, it was like this. When I had realized that I should probably be cooped up within the narrow limits of my occupation all my life, I not only grew sullen, but began to regard my mother and sisters as agents in my misfortune. I was always prompt in sending them their moneys; sometimes, when things were slack, I stinted myself that I might do so, but I was conscious of a growing repugnance towards them. Last Christmas I refused to visit them, and determined to spend the day alone in my snugery, with plenty of books and a roaring fire. All day I grumped, and grizzled, and felt uncomfortable, trying not to own what a brute I'd been, and how unjust. Yet I could not keep myself from picturing all the happy Christmases which had gone before, when my father and mother schemed to make us happy. They always made the same excuse for their efforts, saying that no one could ever foresee what the future held in store. That on some distant Christmas, when we were scattered and lonely, and some of us dead, the memory of the childish days might help to make us better men and women. All this came back to me as I sat by myself brooding. I thought of how good and patient my father had been; of what a quantity of gladness he managed to pack into a short

twenty-four hours. And then I thought of myself, and wondered whether my life was really ended, or whether, perhaps, Christ might not come back to me some day—my father's Christ. When the prodigal sits down to think, he is more than half-way home ; too little thought means too little kindness, a space for either means a possibility of peace.

“By the time evening came I was thoroughly wretched, feeling that I ought to atone for what I had done. At last, I determined to wrap up warmly, as it had been snowing hard, and go round to visit my family.

“Outside it was blowing a blizzard ; for the first time that day, I remembered with pity the poor waifs and strays, homeless and starving in the gutter. The old sign above the door kept swaying to and fro in the gale and creaking on its hinges, just as it has swayed and creaked for hundreds of years. The night was replete with memories.

“As I was about to step into the street, the light fell across a bank of snow which had drifted up against the plinth of the porch. The vibration of my opening the door caused it to tumble inwards. I kicked it, to push it back, and, in so doing, felt my foot strike against something solid. Bending down, I discovered the livid face and long, black hair of a woman of about twenty-eight years of age, but haggard and wasted. I was rather annoyed at this delay of my plans ; took her into my arms and carried her up to my study, where the fire and hot coffee soon revived her. I had not looked at her face very closely, I was too disgusted. She was not the kind of woman of whom men make mention to their sisters. She had evidently sunk very low ; for although her clothes had once been extravagant, they were stained and torn. She wore an old gown of faded scarlet ; a battered velvet hat with a bedraggled plume, and a pair of downtrodden high-heeled

shoes, with crumpled buckles attached, which had once contained some sort of flashy imitation gems.

“‘A nice Christmas gift,’ you will say, and so I thought.

“When she raised her head, the face seemed dimly familiar to me ; but more especially the eyes. There is something very strange about the eyes of a woman. The memory of them remains long after you have lost every record of the face. All her character, and affection, and pity, have looked out from them ; in fact, whatever she has possessed of what we, for want of a better word, call a soul. Gaboriau has noted this same thing. He makes Gevrol’s great claim to distinction centre around his masterly faculty for recognizing eyes. That which he remembered, to aid him in tracing criminals, was the peculiarities of the shape, size, colour, and expression of their eyes ; at these alone he looked, to the exclusion of every other feature.

“So it was with me : I remembered the eyes, but could not recall the face to which they had belonged. It had become such a terrible face, so lined and drawn ; like a piece of old paper one finds in a cupboard after many years, brittle as tinder, yellowed at the edges, fly-blown and covered with cobwebs.

“I don’t think she saw me at first, for she was blinded by the firelight and giddy from exposure. She leered round the room and uttered a vile gutter word, saying, ‘Here’s luck.’

“After a while she caught sight of me and looked intently until, becoming accustomed to the light, she saw my face. Then, with a shrill cry, she laid her hands before her eyes and tried to rise to go, but was too weak, and stumbled headlong across the rug, sobbing.

“The man who can look upon a woman crying, and remain unmoved, has never had a mother. In a moment

I was down by her side, all my repugnance gone, trying in a clumsy male way to comfort her.

“I pulled at her hands, but all in vain, and at last listened to what she was saying. ‘Oh, John, do let me go! I promise that I’ll never come back. It’s all a mistake. I didn’t know that it was your house—I didn’t really.’

“Like a flash I recognized her. I think it was the way in which she pronounced my name which brought it back. She was a girl I had known in the early days; the first girl I had ever loved. A man may outlive many things, his sins, his courage, and even his life, but he never grows any bigger than his first affection. A woman never knows the intensity of love until she has married; after marriage no man does, unless he be shallow, or very lucky.

“For the sake of the days that were past I began to feel tenderly towards her, vile as she was. Christmas is the proper season for kindness; and, after the harsh day I had spent, I could well afford to overlook barriers of time, and place, and propriety, to do one small charity.

“I made her comfortable, and led her on to speak of herself. The story she told was very sordid, but very pitiful. It is not worth repeating, except for one incident. It appears that she had never ceased to love me; that, even in her heyday, she had been accustomed to drive down at times from the West End after nightfall and stand about before my house, gazing up at my study window, and watching to see where my shadow groped across the panes as I moved around the room. When she told me this, I remembered often having seen a woman standing stationary within the shelter of the houses opposite, more especially when the street was dark and wet with rain; and how I had often stood at the window watching her. One is apt to grow superstitious, living alone in an old house of curious reputation. I had begun to associate her

shadow with the sign which hangs before my door, and to think of her as a reincarnation of the Weeping Woman who first gave her name to the tavern.

“Now that I discovered to whom that shadow belonged, the accident seemed more than a coincidence, and I was troubled. I thought of how selfish I had been, living here all those years with that poor woman, whom I might have saved, slinking down the sodden road to shame, watching nightly within a stone’s throw of my door, whilst I had not even had the curiosity to inquire her name.

“Well, I let her run on with her half-truths and bitter accusations against persons and things in general—fate, circumstance, and all the other *noms-de-plume* of God. At last, when she had spent her anger, I sent her to bed, and sat down to think.

“The upshot of the whole matter is this: I sent her into the country to get her moral and physical strength restored, and now she is coming back to my house to help me in the business. It will not be safe to leave a woman of her excitable nature to her own devices for a long time to come; she’s got no one who will take her in, so I must. I thought I ought to tell you this, seeing that you are going to join me; but you must not pretend that you know anything of her past. Her name is Kate.”

They had already passed by High Beech on the right, and now, breaking out from the woods, came upon a side-track which they followed until, at a bend in the road, the Quiver Inn was reached—a decayed hostelry of old coaching days. In the garden, at the back of the house, were arbours, white with convolvulus, and a row of straw-thatched hives with the bees at work, pollen-smirched and humming. Far out below their feet the long, undulating stretch of mysterious woodland lay.

Choosing the arbour farthest from the road, they ordered

lunch from a red-cheeked serving-maid, and knocked out the ashes from their pipes.

Gabriel was the first to resume the interrupted conversation.

“You are the last man I should ever have expected to do this. I have never in my life come into contact with these women, and have done my best to forget that they exist. Decay in autumn is terrible ; when it sets in in spring-time it is unnatural and ghastly. I have always found it exceedingly difficult to keep myself unspotted from the world, so probably my reluctance to approach a fallen woman, even in pity, is a form of cowardice. I admire those who can.”

“It is cowardice, I think. For the great bulk of men, pure religion and undefiled is to keep their sins unspotted from the world, and, so far as may be, unknown to God. The man who is conserving his purity out of self-interest, and nothing else, is most in danger of losing his purity. An unimproved virtue is more deadly than an active vice. We are all ready to admit that evil is a belligerent quality, but most of us are content to be persuaded that virtue is passive as the grave. I made this mistake, until Kate happened at my door, taking credit to myself for the sins which I had not committed, and accounting myself an honourable man. I don't know where your path may lead you, Gabriel, but I speak out of my own experience when I say, that no man can be happy unless he is *doing* good. You yourself acknowledge that I am changed—now you have the reason. I intend to devote the rest of my life to helping just such people as Kate, and to giving them a new chance.”

“All this is very splendid in you—it's grand ! If you go on in this way, you will become a second St. Francis, and people, when you are dead, will make pilgrimages to ‘The House of the Weeping Woman.’ Why, you've got

the name of your order ready to hand—"The Brotherhood of the Weeping Woman." It sounds fine. But I wish I was more like you, and could feel life more seriously."

"Yes, it is life, Gabriel; the great, tragic sum total of insignificant suffering, that we ought to feel more seriously. Not our own lives, God forbid; we take them seriously enough already; with most of us one degree more would spell madness."

"But, John, I must confess that I have rather shunned philanthropy; it has always seemed to me to be yoke-fellow to old age and decrepitude. The final, frenzied effort of the bankrupt to balance his ledger."

"The more's the shame. Youth is like the sea; it sucks in all the rivers, but makes no new ones."

"And what is old age?"

"The rivers—always contributing to the sea."

"And death?"

"The river-bed—run dry."

"That is very hard on Youth. Yet it is in some ways true. Nevertheless, you cannot account for Christ by such reasonings. He died at thirty-three."

"Ah, with Christ it was different. He was like the rain, and came from above."

"Now I know why He is eternal; because, being neither young nor old, He must have been divine. I have always been conscious of the timelessness in His life, even when reading of His childhood."

"Good men never grow old; they are all divine."

"Then," said Gabriel, "I will become good."

"Are you so easily persuaded, Gabriel, by the pretty marrying of a few phrases in the presence of a happy illustration?"

"No, I am not so light as that; but last night some one used similar words to me. They should be prophetic."

“Then let us strive together, Gabriel.”

“Yes ; we will be like the rain, coming from above.”

And this happened in an arbour within earshot of a public-house, so untimely are the seasons of the soul. It is only on the stage, or in books, that scenery harmonizes with moods. So ill-proportioned is Man to his environment that he sometimes over-rides his environment ; this is the strongest argument for his eternity. The great love scenes of life are enacted in garrets, under leaking roofs, on cracked chairs, and very seldom in the gardens and alley-ways of Verona. The bravest hearts break in secret, and without much noise—in London slums and obscure hamlets. Harmony is the handmaid of Art, and human life is very far from artistic. Poets and painters are always trying to make it seem so. They sing or draw something, and call it Life. We pass by, and admire, but do not recognize. It is merciful that we do not ; otherwise we should become but more famished for the immediate realization of our dreams ; the more discontent with ourselves, and this, without the poet’s future gaze.

Having finished their meal, they turned their steps toward Loughton, on the homeward journey.

“We have come very near to one another to-day,” said Lancaster. “I think there is only one thing more I should like to tell you, after which you will know me nearly as I know myself.”

“And what is that ?”

“In undertaking any work of this kind amongst women it is necessary that there should be some good woman at hand. You have never met my cousin, Hilda Kirk ; if you had you would agree with me that she is the one woman for the task. Once on a time I was very much in love with her, and am still, for that matter ; but at first I had hoped to marry her. We had already become engaged, when scruples began to arise within me as to the expediency

of cousins marrying. I went into the question at fuller length, and found that the more I investigated, the more certain did I become that in such unions the physical and mental health of the children is mortgaged for the selfish gratification of the parents. I tried to parley with my conscience, and, at last, went to Hilda, and told her my doubts—by agreement we parted.

“After the incident of Christmas night I saw that, if I was to rescue Kate, it must be through the help and example of a pure woman. I thought matters out, and wrote to Hilda, asking her to come. She has consented, and may arrive at any time. In this way, although we can never marry, we shall at least be near one another. So far as I can judge, this arrangement between us will be permanent. Hilda has no father or mother; she is absolutely alone in the world, so that, although I dare not be her husband, it is quite plain to me that I ought to be her guardian.”

“Won’t her very nearness be a danger, making you unresigned?” asked Gabriel.

“No; I think I would rather have it this way. When you are married to a woman the binding tie of love becomes unnecessary, the handcuffs of law take its place. There is little occasion for love where two people are so secure of one another. With us it will be different; we must be lovers throughout life, which is far better.”

But Gabriel was thinking of Helen, and of the song which she had sung, and only replied, “Life is a long road which has many turnings. You will need to love her well.”

CHAPTER V

ENTER A TRUTH-TELLER

ON the journey homeward from Loughton they did not often speak; each was pursuing his own thoughts in companionable silence. When the train drew into the London terminus their tongues were again loosened.

“What kind of a woman is your cousin?” asked Gabriel.

“She is the kind who speaks out the truth to men’s faces, and reserves the fictions to cover up their faults to others—behind their backs.”

“If truth be stranger than fiction, her friendships must be vastly exciting.”

“I think not. We all know so much about ourselves, that we are only irritated when another discovers our truth—we resent it. It’s too much like robbing a man of his only suit of clothes. Her life has not been a happy one, and she has few friends. The reason’s obvious—people are frightened of her. Fiction with a basis of truth may be stranger than fact, and exhilarating, because the truth is draped, and, therefore, mysterious. Truth, as it exists for conscientious persons, such as my cousin, always goes mother-naked, and nudity shocks.”

“I have always held,” said Gabriel, “that fictitious truth came nearer to truth than truthful fact.”

“Yes, so it does in the long run. The truths of an individual are always false when applied helter-skelter to

the masses; for that very reason truthful fiction is frequently a lie."

"Usually, or what is worse, it bores."

"That isn't very kind of you, Gabriel, if you apply it to my cousin."

"Oh, I don't; but, for all that, I should hate to have any one tell me the appalling truth about myself just at present."

"If that is so, I shall have to warn Hilda."

It was past eight o'clock, and the shop was already closed, when they arrived. Lancaster had his key in the latch when the door was opened from within by a young woman. She was of delicate proportions, being very small and slightly built; so much so, that at first sight she seemed not more than eighteen, though a closer inspection made her out to be anywhere between twenty and thirty. Her hair was dark and luxuriant; her face pale; her lips rose red; her eyes large and luminous. The impression she created was that of a healthy, open-hearted boy, or of one who had ceased to grow at the age when others were getting their first lessons in worldly wisdom. Her innocence was conspicuous and spontaneous; it had never hardened into habit. There was a quiet contentment about her person which made it impossible to believe that her knowledge could encompass such distresses as those which had been discussed that day. It was manifest that any over-emphasis of truthfulness which she might make, arose not out of cruelty, but from the innate veracity of her nature. This was Lancaster's cousin.

On going up-stairs, they found that something had already been done to rectify the slovenliness of a bachelor's housekeeping. The evidences of a woman's hands were bespoken in the recently-acquired transparency of the windows, the brightness of the grate, and the orderly little meal which had been prepared.

“Really, your house was a disgrace,” she said laughingly, by way of explanation. “I arrived just after you went out, and it has taken me the entire day to put one room to rights, what with cigar-ash and old pipes.”

Leaving the room, she came back carrying a spirit-kettle, which she soon set a-singing, after which they sat down to a belated tea.

The sweetness and comfort of a woman’s presence are not discovered until she has returned from a long absence. If Eve had been more remote at the outset, Adam would have appreciated her better in the end. He would have been more chivalrous about the theft of the apple, and would have covered up her indiscretion with some tender lie; which, I think, God would have smiled at in secret, and have openly pardoned.

The casting-out began in Man, when he deserted his love; not in Eve, when she stretched up her hand for the fruit which was forbidden.

Man loves too little, Woman too much; and thus we lose our Edens. This is the beginning and the end of every human garden.

Something of this passed through Lancaster’s mind as he watched his cousin presiding over his table as if by right. All these years he had been wretched and morbid: now he knew the reason; he had shut himself off from communion with his Eve till life had grown one-sided, lacking in sympathy, incomplete. The words of the pleasure-seeking Greek, often read, never quite apprehended, returned to him reproachfully: “We ought to look round for people with whom to eat and drink, before we search for something to eat and drink. To feed without a friend is the life of a lion and a wolf.” This he had not done; and from one so obvious an oversight had arisen all his griefs.

Bitterness is not indigenous to Woman; it is the

horrible perquisite of Man. No woman has ever been successful as a cynic, only ridiculous—like a cockney tourist among the pyramids. If he had associated less with men and more with women (this woman in particular), the past ten years might have been kinder.

Gabriel was possessed by similar thoughts, but they brought him no happiness; he was still sorry for that which he had lost, a loss which the present occasion only served to emphasize.

At first there was little conversation. For these two men, made lonely by choice and fate, pleasure was complete in the sense of a woman's nearness, and the quiet attentions of her serving hands. Like the arrogant English in a foreign land, she had walked in unexpectedly and possessed herself of all that was best in both their natures.

She was too wise to speak at once. For all her boyish frankness, she was sufficiently conventional to appreciate the rarefaction of atmosphere which her advent had occasioned; also she was so much a woman as to be flattered and amused thereby. Keeping her eyes on the level, she watched them unabashed, and steadily encountered each furtive glance of theirs. She was pleased by their sudden shyness, though a trifle anxious because of it, and smiled quaintly to herself while she waited for one of them to break the silence. At last, because the muteness of their homage threatened to make them permanently dumb, she had compassion on them. There was an expression so odd in the solemnity of their faces that she could not refrain from laughing outright. "You haven't much to say to me," she said, by way of apology; "yet just now, when I saw you coming up the street, you looked as if all the roar of London could not hush the torrent of your words."

"I was taken up with thinking how pleasant it was to have you with us," John explained, with laconic sincerity.

"Then why didn't you say so?" she asked. "People usually speak, all their cruel, critical suspicions to our faces in our lifetime, and every fact that is kind and encouraging behind our backs in our absence, or when we have done with life. Yet one little word, spoken in the living presence, is worth all the panegyrics which men scrawl on each other's graves. Why do we do so?"

"Because we are in mortal terror of making one another conceited," Gabriel replied.

"So we prefer to make one another sullen by mentioning only uglinesses. Personally, I applaud the virtues of conceit. They are the great incentive to make men brave. Besides, conceit is at least honest in the opinion which it holds of itself, whereas modesty is a counterfeit Miss who is for ever pretending to underrate her own value. Now that I have explained my views, you need have no fears about spoiling me by anything you may say. I want, above all things, to think well of myself, and have so far found the task difficult. You will help me and, at the same time, relieve yourselves by thinking aloud."

"That is one of those curiously exaggerated half-truths which Hilda is always formulating—a kind of perverted axiom which glorifies a fault and makes her delightful," said Lancaster, smiling across at Gabriel. Then, to his cousin, "You see, Hilda, I'm growing into your habit."

"Any one can be delightful," she replied, "who cares to speak exactly what he thinks; that which levels us all down into the dust of commonplace is the prevalent habit of lying—of falsifying our essential selves, in order that we may approximate to a recognized social type. Why, when any one is brave enough to walk abroad bare of disguise, he is at once dubbed a poser by those who drape their intellects in the fashionable ideas of the day."

"But don't you think," interrupted Gabriel, "that your policy of truthfulness cuts both ways, inasmuch as it lets

people know not only their good qualities, but also their bad ones? In the latter case, to lie is to be kind."

"That may very well be; but the fact remains that what first made Galilee a name to be loved was the brief sojourn there of One who never deceived. This is what I mean—that nearly all our wretchedness takes its genesis from the craving after ungratified affection. Our most sordid vices result from desperate attempts on the part of men and women to steal, borrow, or beg the loves which they cannot command. That was how Kate came to sin. Wickedness grows out of hardening of heart, which comes of enforced isolation. If people would only speak the gentle truth, most of our miseries would vanish. Our modern economic system is based upon competition, which reserves no place for charity. Love is treated as a luxury of the well-to-do, with which they are at liberty, if so they condescend, to occupy their leisure time: it is no longer a necessity of life. If it were, in twelve months it would revolutionize society. We know that; therefore we are afraid. The trouble with us is that we are all liars, mere triflers with words. Over-civilization has made us so rotten with artificiality that, should a man meet his own soul walking through a fashionable street, he would cut it dead, lest it should be recognized as his. The tendency of all this shrouding and hedging in of our hearts is seen in the case of St. Augustine, when he says, 'And what was there wherein I took delight, save to love and be loved.' That is the explanation which he gives for all his squalid sinnings. In his utter loneliness he did not care how far he wandered or how low he sank, provided only he might attain love. When he had discovered the mystic lover proffered him by the Roman Church, he abandoned his lovers of the highways; his heart was satisfied, and his journeys were at an end. The desire of the men and women of to-day is to love and be loved,

and at any price. You can see it in their eyes, and in the way they smile. Yet we all conspire to be blind to one another's greatest need; to act as though we were self-sufficient when the heart is breaking; to live as strangers when we might be friends—and are all very lonely. Such indifference to emotion is wasteful; it is outrageous and wicked.”

She stopped abruptly, and withdrew her eyes, realizing how strange such words must sound when spoken by a girl in the presence of two men.

“Miss Kirk is right,” said Gabriel. “We spend our days together in coining pretty phrases and thinking ourselves clever fellows, while all the time we are hungering after a fuller sympathy, so complete that there shall never be any necessity for confessing, which shall leave no hiding-place unexplored, wherein we may be misunderstood. We are all looking for the coming of that one human creature who, gazing into our eyes, may know us throughout, and love us in spite of that knowledge. That which we call curiosity in vulgar people is more often, I fancy, the clumsy expression of this desire to communicate themselves rather than to probe us.”

“And supposing we should all take to speaking the truth, what would happen?” queried Lancaster.

“It would make us free,” replied Hilda, in a low voice.

“Like a novel in a public library, to be taken out by any one, for our leaves to be tattered and dog-eared?” He spoke bitterly, rather to himself than to the others.

“No. Like a good man's memory—to be loved by all the world,” she said.

The clock of St. Lawrence struck half-past nine. They rose and cleared the table, after which Hilda said good-night, and vanished.

“Well, what do you think?” asked Lancaster.

“I hardly know,” replied Gabriel, “except that I have

been convicted of being an habitual liar, and feel very ashamed of myself."

"That's the way most people feel when Hilda has done with them."

"I suppose so. The funny thing is that I have always held that woman is less truthful than man—except when she is angry. Now, here have I been convicted of my own untruth by the voice of the defendant."

"That is the dire penalty which may overtake any man who sets himself up as a judge; he is always liable to correction from the dock," answered Lancaster, laughing. And then they also betook themselves to bed.

CHAPTER VI

TWO GO IN SEARCH AFTER HAPPINESS

SUNDAY at the Turnpike was a quiet day. Costers' cries, which had made the week merry and boisterous, had died away. Vendors of periwinkles and crustacean delicacies, who had stained the night gaudily with the flare and smoke of naphtha lamps, had folded their tabernacles of delight and vanished, leaving, as a sole record of their stay, a few scattered mounds of emptied shells.

Many things which made the Turnpike what it was, with its reckless poverty and strenuous toil, had departed. The street was unlike itself, forsaken and forlorn. Across the way the bells of St. Lawrence were ringing a sorrowful refrain, sick and tired of welcoming worshippers who never came. But the sun was shining, and a caged thrush was singing, as one determined to show that the Turnpike could be grateful for its day of rest, though church-pews stood vacant.

Now and then a frowsy head would push out from a garret window, turn and twist with drowsy eyes and withdraw, presumably for another hour of sleep.

Sabbath observance laws are not necessary where men work fourteen hours out of every twenty-four. The Turnpike was a strict observer of the fourth commandment ; it was too weary to be anything else, and spent the bulk of Sunday in bed.

Lancaster had battled desperately for a while against this

decadent practice of the land wherein he dwelt ; latterly he had succumbed like the rest. This morning, however, was an exception, or rather the beginning of many such. With the coming of his cousin, he abandoned bachelor vices. After an early breakfast it was decided that Gabriel should spend the morning in the study, formulating his plans, for he said, "To laugh in the face of the world is easy ; so much as to smile in the face of one's family requires thought." Therefore he was going to think. After so long an absence, Lancaster was eager to be alone with his cousin, and proposed to her a walk through the city.

When two people love very dearly it is difficult to speak, and, moreover, language is unnecessary. On through the Turnpike they went, past the Mansion House, along Victoria Street, and so to the Embankment. Something of his old youthful buoyancy came back to him as he strolled through the deserted gullies of the great metropolis, hearing naught save the gliding of her feet at his side, and the swish of her woman's dress, remindful, even amid the cobblestones of London, of tall grasses and country lanes. From Monday to Saturday his life seemed insignificant and of no account, because of the giant turmoil of millions. What was he among so many ? Who would note his absence, were he to die ? How few would mourn ? But on Sunday, when bruised hands find ease from toil, and men have occasion to forget that they have ever laboured, his existence became an important factor. The echo of his tread, which for the past six days had been drowned by travelling wheels, to-day reverberated and startled the silence, filling the street with warnings of his approach. To-day he was an individual ; yesterday, the mere thread in the tiny screw of a vast machine.

The Embankment was deserted. On one side of the way flowers were blowing, recalling meadow memories with their fragrance. On the other lay the river, grey and slightly

ruffled by the breeze, where clumsy craft swayed at anchor, effortless, without ambition for anything but sleep. Far to the right a bridge smudged the blue, across which crawled a speck of yellow, a 'bus whose progress could be discerned only by where its transit blotted out and revealed again the sunlight through the trellises as it journeyed. Save this, nothing moved; nor was there any sound of strife.

Very lazily they walked, and at length stood still, leaning against the parapet, watching the dark, sluggish flow of the river beneath them.

"We were foolish to have parted in the way we did," said Lancaster; then after a pause, "We shall make good comrades yet, don't you think, although we are not married?"

"Love is better than marriage," she answered; "it demands more loyalty."

"Why did we not arrive at this solution long ago?" he queried, in the voice of one who is too contented to care greatly whether he is answered.

"Perhaps because we were disappointed, and not sufficiently in love."

"Disappointment is love's best gift; it makes languid men love better. We should have known that."

"Surely; but it is difficult to know anything accurately when the heart is breaking."

"You also have been unhappy then?"

"Yes, until last night. I dreaded lest you had gone out of my life for ever. It is so tragically easy for a man to forget; the curse of a woman is that she always remembers."

"And if I had forgotten, I don't think you would have lost much; I should have been the loser. Even now I hesitate at my selfishness in sharing with you the penalties of my unsuccess. Meagre environments have

reacted upon my mind. I have grown bitter and critical, so that it is difficult for me to love mankind. I can always see faults long before I become aware of virtues ; by the time I have finished reviewing folk's failings, I fear, too often I have tired my eyes. You see, I am discontented, and want to be other than I am. I am sufficiently conceited to believe that I could once have been a genius, had I been given my chance. That chance will never come now, and, if it does, it will arrive too late ; for my impulse is gone. However I regard myself, I am forced to admit myself a failure, one who has disappointed both himself and his Maker."

"Disappointment is love's best gift ; you yourself have said it. Our defeats should make us strong. If life was not a battle, it wouldn't be worth the living. I can see already what the struggle has done for you in making you true and brave."

"Then you don't know me, for that is what it ought to have done for me—what I wish it had done—not what I am."

"Whatever a man desires with all his heart to become, that he is. God judges us by that which we want to be, not by what we are. That is what makes Him so much kinder than men. When a woman loves, she judges as God judges—which makes her love divine."

"But you judge me as you would have me to be—which is a very different question."

"Where is the good of talking ? You are a poor man, and yet you have offered Gabriel a home without ever letting him know how you will have to pinch for his support. You are going to take Kate in, and she won't be one atom of use to you in your business, and will probably cause you a lot of worry. You have very little to spare, but have kept your mother and sisters ever since your father's death. You have sacrificed your career for

their sakes, and are now going to set out upon a quixotic private endeavour to reclaim the irreclaimable, which will lead people to misinterpret your motives. If you could only see yourself as you are, you would judge yourself as I do."

"That is to say as God does, seeing that you love me, and so become at once judge and defendant of myself. You have the endearing lack of logic of all good women. If I were to argue with you I should spoil you; so I won't."

"You couldn't. At least, you would never persuade me."

"That is because you are a woman. Now, to change the subject, tell me what you think of Gabriel?"

"He is a very young, young man, for he airs his views with the cheerful finality of youth. He is fond of epigram, and therefore ignorant of life. He has always had an abundance of money, and for that reason cannot estimate his own true worth. He has never been poor, and that is why he finds the giving up of all that he has so easy. He is full of faults, and therefore intolerant of weakness in others. His new departure will bring him sorrow, and through sorrow something to write about. He believes in himself, therefore he will succeed. He is more lovable than faulty, so I shall like him. Any more questions to ask?"

"No, not about Gabriel. I think you are unjust; you will change your mind when you know him better."

"There, I have offended! I will make amends by adding one word more. He is like a handsome little boy who thinks that he is doing wrong, and likes doing it. He will hurt himself one day, and then, because he is so handsome, all the world will journey to comfort him. In the meanwhile he will have broken many hearts; no one will remember them. He will learn to smile again, and

will grow into a strong man ; but those other people will never grow at all ; they will be dead. He has nothing worth saying at present, but, when he has grown older, he will talk very beautifully of the griefs which he has shared and inflicted ; and people will come to listen, and may be helped. How do you like that ? I can't tell you what is false."

"I don't see that it is much better than what you have already said. You speak of him as fickle and slight."

"No. Don't I say that he is very lovable ? To make other people love you is next best to loving other people—which is best of all. Up to the present he has been loved. When he has suffered, he will learn to love ; then he will be magnificent."

"That is all very well, but you make him out to be so selfish, and he really isn't."

"In every martyrdom there are two crucifixions : the first appears to be selfish—when the man abandons his mother, his father, his brethren, and his friends for his dream's sake ; the second is magnanimous and justifies the first—when he himself hangs upon a cross. Many dreamers accomplish only the first. I have confidence to believe that Gabriel will complete the second. To-day I see him in his rose garden while his mother and father stand without weeping, and I say that he is selfish. He has left them and gone where they can never follow. The time will come when, with all the long line of visionaries, he will enter his Gethsemane. When that happens, I, for one, shall be prepared to worship. Now do you understand ?"

"You speak like an oracle. I hope that the shadow will not bring the presence to pass."

"If it does not, Gabriel Garrod will have failed."

"We all fail," he sighed, thinking of his own life.

“Not if we love,” she said in a whisper, pressing near to him.

He answered nothing, but stretched far out into the sunshine to feel the wind upon his cheek, and enjoy to the uttermost the moment in its flight.

“We must be getting homeward,” she said ; “he will wonder where we have gone.”

They turned, and walked slowly back by way of Ludgate Circus until they came to St. Paul’s. In the Sabbath stillness, the sound of people at prayer floated out toward them, like the breath of wind among rushes, or the rustle of leaves when they fall. He looked into her eyes and, perceiving her willingness, ascended the steps and passed in.

At first they could not see for the sudden change of light, but, as it grew more accustomed, black rows of bowed worshippers became apparent, white-robed pigmy priests, windows with flaming saints, and the terrific dignity of the sculptured dead.

Not far inside, they halted, standing motionless. From very far away came a voice scarce human, retreating, rallying, rising, only to fade again among distant columns. “I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” The organ pealed and quavered. The choir fluttered in the half-light like white doves in a forest, and the anthem took up the burthen as a refrain. Distinct above all other voices soared the confident treble of a young boy, “I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me shall never die.”

Tears came into their eyes : for the child singer, lest his certainty should be shaken ; for themselves, in pity for their unbelief. Long before the music had ceased they had turned and fled. Once outside, Lancaster, remembering how he had said, “Religion is like a boy’s voice, it breaks before manhood, and no one ever can tell whether it will come

back as tenor or bass—still less whether it will retain its singing quality ; the boy himself least of all,” felt to the full the tragedy of his random speech.

“Do you believe it ?” Hilda asked eagerly.

“What ?”

“Why, the words they sang ?”

“There is only one thing which I have ever been able to believe without reserve—my unbelief,” he replied sadly.

“Doubt is my only creed.”

“Every man is greater than his creed, thank God, and you are more faithful than your doubt.”

“I wish that I might think so. It is the misery of intellectual bickering that has driven me to the task which I now purpose—that of going to *the gone-under*. If I cannot believe in Christ, I can at least try to do what He did.”

“Nothing else matters much, I think. The orthodoxy of to-day is the soiled linen of a bygone heresy. Belief varies from age to age ; *doing* is always the same. Doubts are imposed from without, deeds arise from within. If the heart is right, we shall live ; perhaps, we shall see God. What are rewards, in any case, if we only do well ?”

CHAPTER VII

RAMPANT LION LANE

AUGUST was over and past, September had come and gone, and the trees were bare of leaves. It was the month of December ; a touch of winter was in the air, pleasant at present, but prophesying harshness to come. Affairs at the Turnpike had travelled rapidly. Kate had been there for some time. She certainly did not recommend the plans made for her redemption. She was irritable and sullen for the most part ; extremely jealous of Hilda's position in the household, eager upon every occasion to assert her independence, recalling in her fits of passion, which were frequent, the fast and loose of her former life as enviable things—never for a moment exhibiting regret for her follies. To Gabriel her attitude was that of a coquette ; to Hilda of a vixen. Lancaster alone had any restraining influence over her, and even that was not of a proper sort, but based upon fondnesses of other days which she insisted upon importing into her present relationship. Her entire lack of remorse was only to be surpassed by her blank ingratitude. No word of thanks for kindnesses bestowed ever escaped her lips ; they were all taken as a matter of course.

Instead of the repentant Magdalene, whom imagination had painted, the realized fact was that of a stray dog, owning no allegiance, making use of a stranger's shelter from a storm, preparatory to taking the road again. In making

arrangements for her reception, Lancaster had been emphatic that she should be made to feel as one of themselves, and should be treated as though nothing discreditable had happened. She was to help in the running of the house and assist in the shop, serving customers and typing his correspondence. Everything had been done upon her advent to make her at home. Lancaster held the theory that, in treating her record as non-existent, she would be enabled to forget ; and that, in using her as a pure woman, she would become one.

His welcome was misunderstood from the first. Courtesies were taken for compliments ; for being other than she was she had no desire. To forget appeared to be the last thing in her thoughts. Her altered social status and new-found comfort had in no way changed the essential woman. Her manners were an insult, and her presence a pain.

When Lancaster informed her that she was to work in his business she pouted, and subsequently proved herself worse than useless, turning away customers on many occasions either by her over-familiarity, or her studied rudeness. In the house itself she was willing to see any one work but herself. In the innumerable petty duties of housekeeping she never raised a finger unless after repeated requests had been made, and then, with a surly defiance, which hindered rather than helped.

Wherever she came she brought discord either by her excess or lack of affection.

In spite of disappointment Lancaster persevered, keeping his behaviour uniformly kind, never losing his temper, always respectful and chivalrous.

Hilda, who suffered most from the tyranny of her deportment, was loyal in her seconding of Lancaster's efforts. She never retorted, never appeared grieved, and strove by her cheerfulness to make up for the deficiencies of this extraordinary guest. How much abuse she suffered at

Kate's hands she never told ; but her eyes were often suspiciously red and her face tremulous.

Kate herself was a fine-looking woman ; above the average height, full of vitality—the very essence of life. The wholesomeness of the country had repaired the havoc she had made in her appearance ; health had put colour into her cheeks, filling out their hollows, but had not restored the lost modesty. All it had sufficed was to give her the animal courage to brazen out shame, and the physical well-being to tide over disgrace. She was beautiful, that there could be no denying ; but her beauty was not of the best sort.

To Gabriel this lack of harmony was a continual vexation. He had lived so few years, and had been so well guarded in his home, that protracted annoyance was a thing unknown to him, and not to be endured. The pampered idol of a rich house, he had been accustomed to express a wish and see it gratified ; this experience of finding something outside the circle of his will was a perpetual source of harassment. In abandoning comfort for ambition, he had foreseen privation through a golden haze, but not this kind of sorry irritation.

During the first few weeks of his exile he had been enthusiastic about the new form of philanthropy, and willing to assist. It was so novel that it kindled his fancy and enlarged his emotions. Now that his phantom dream of charity had materialized into a drudging fight of daily recurrence against a dwarfed and mean-spirited nature, the planting of good things to see them immediately supplanted by bad, his heart sickened and generosity gave way before disgust.

“ You love her too well,” he would say. “ Such women are not to be reformed by kindness, but by cruelty. The best thing you can do for her is to fling her out homeless on the street, and let her realize who she is. Then, when

she crawls back, if ever she does, you may be able to make something of her—but not till then.”

But Hilda and John would shake their heads, wisely making allowances and manufacturing excuses for a crooked temperament, saying that they still hoped that the change would come.

Then he would grow angry, and go away to brood. Their conduct seemed to him quite unreasonable, and, moreover, selfish towards himself. How could a man achieve genuine greatness when surrounded by such squalid contentions? They should think more of him and less of the woman. They were sacrificing the intellectual repose, which was essential to his triumph, to the battling jealousies of a woman off the streets. The next twelve months, he told himself, would be the most crucial in his career; in them he must approve himself, and from them take the measure of his actual height.

If this sort of tense misery were to drag on for much longer his aspirations and ideals would cease to thrive, and dwindle away into a listless, lackadaisical desire to write.

He would fain have deserted the Weeping Woman, and have gone elsewhere, had it not been for his scarcity of funds. At the Turnpike, with the little money he had, he might manage to survive, but nowhere else. Here he was entertained; anywhere else he would have to pay for his lodging. So far he had earned nothing; therefore removal was impossible.

Mingled with his resentment was a sense of injured purity. The sight of this woman was contaminating. The cousins interpreted his thoughts from his conduct, and did their best to make matters less difficult, smoothing over differences and taking laborious journeys to hedge in his peace. Kate perceived his meaning at an early stage, and, strange to say, did not seem to resent it.

On the contrary, she was rather pleased—this was the kind of treatment to which she had been used. Nevertheless, it did not prevent her from doing her best to worry him, referring spitefully to him as “the literary gentleman,” when his manuscripts were returned, and cringing when his anger flamed. She appeared to be always seeking out a home for her vagabond affections. When it was not Lancaster, it was Gabriel—a thing very distasteful to the latter.

Three months had bred much ill-feeling on Gabriel's part; it had been just long enough to make him realize the humiliation of his position, and not sufficiently long for him to achieve results.

Not infrequently his mind fled back with longing to the luxury he had left, to Helen and his home, contrasting the delicate pleasures of former days with the sordid facts of his present existence. He wrote and wrote, prose, verse, and fiction, but never had anything accepted. His inspiration was always the same—passionate love of an idealized mankind; bitter contempt of mankind as a fact; sorrowful anger against the sort of God and the kind of world which could tolerate such a fact; and lastly, a shadowy glimpse of the perfect, subjective land, creatable for himself by every man, whither escape is possible. So, contemporary experience was his inspiration. At the back of all his thoughts stood Kate, the unloved and unlovable, the betrayed and cast-out of society; worshipful and womanly as she ought to have been; ungracious and derided as she actually was; and for landscape to her portrait, the vision of a seething, leprous world which, for the sake of an hour's pleasure and a moment's jest, had robbed her of her power to live well. His mind was dominated by her tragedy. He saw her counterpart in every street. By day she touched him with her corpse-like hands, and she walked with him through his sleep by night. The unforgettable horror to him about her loss was that she alone

seemed unaware of it. As completion to his anguish, was his own remorse that, though he pitied her utterly in the abstract as a type, he was cruelly impatient of her as an individual, in realized form.

Since this was the atmosphere which pervaded all his work, there is little room for surprise that nothing of his creation was bought. The world, like the individual, prefers flattery to scorn, and does not often reward its harsh-tongued prophets for pointing out its faults.

He attributed his failure, not unjustly, to his environment. He tended more and more to seek his relaxations out of doors, and to keep them to himself. In doing this he was conscious of a sneaking sense of shame; it looked as though he were making a mere use of Lancaster's hospitality, as indeed he was. When he returned from a happy oasis of pleasure to the dreary drab of the Turnpike, and the flagrant odour of fried fish and pickled mussels which prevail along this mile of poverty, and, climbing the grimy staircase to the study, discovered Lancaster still hard at work, his self-reproach became bitter. Latterly Lancaster had risen earlier and retired later, often toiling for twelve and fourteen hours a day, in order to keep the household running. Gabriel was unaware of the reason; if he had been, he might have been more accommodating.

Unfortunately, we usually discover our saints long after their sacrifice has forgotten its pain, when gratitude is purposeless, and has lost its power to console.

Hilda he could not understand. She was so quiet, thorough, and painstaking. She was one of those women who speak most bitterly when they say least. When he had lost his temper and had said something particularly foolish, she would simply raise her eyes and look at him once with a neutral gaze; her silence was more reproving than many words.

If he had examined her hands, he might have been more patient. They were long and thin, and wonderfully framed. The hands of an artist, constructed for ornament rather than for use. Nevertheless, they were ingrained and roughened by severe labours; the needle-finger was pricked and sore with over-use. There was something very sad about the sight of them; they were so evidently made for pleasure, and had so mismanaged their task. Lancaster often noticed them, and remonstrated with her. However, when a woman is purchasing her footing daily with her affection, she is not over-scrupulous as to how she denies herself.

To crown these manifold discomfitures, there was the persistency of Lancaster's charitable intents. The idea had become deep-rooted in his mind that works were of more value than faiths; and so, in proportion as he disbelieved in religion, he strove to act up to its precepts. Having rescued Kate, he became enamoured of his task—aflame to rescue others.

The method of his procedure was very simple. He flung his house open to any comer, asking no questions. Every visitor received hospitality and friendship, male or female, tattered or tidy. His name became a by-word in the district, and his table was always attended by some unfortunate of the social *débris*. Many were impostors who simply came for what they could extort; but he treated all alike, as in the case of Kate, with a uniform kindness. Frequently such people would offer to stay the night; they were never refused. Sometimes he would discover and bring home drunkards and night-walkers, when the house was already full. In such cases, he himself slept on the floor that they might occupy his bed. His one desire was to live like Christ.

Eccentricity and heroism are either contagious or repellent. Gabriel was not infected. On the contrary, he felt

his inferiority, and, as is usual under such circumstances, resented the charity of others as magnifying his own lack of the same. It did not seem to him expedient that he should lose his night's rest at this juncture; he required to conserve his forces for brain work, and did. There was nothing unreasonable in his attitude, but it made him feel awkward when others were so spendthrift in their giving.

He discovered a refuge from this constraint in an unexpected quarter.

In his rambles it had been his habit, in more prosperous days, to seek out the less known by-ways of London, and to haunt the various old curio-shops which they contain. Amongst these is one called Rampant Lion Lane, an ancient place, with overhanging gabled houses of early Tudor period, lying at the back of New Oxford Street. In it stood a second-hand book shop, kept by one, Louis Lanier. Unlike most men of his class, he was possessed of a genuine culture, valuing money not at all, but book knowledge to excess. Often, when a customer inclined to purchase some old volume, he would state his price, and then implore him not to buy, because he loved that book too well. Lanier was a man of about sixty years, ill-kempt and shabby in appearance, but unmistakably a gentleman. He was one of those evident failures of London life, the more pathetic because he was so contented to fail.

The lane in which he lived was poor and of unsavoury reputation. Barred at either end to prevent wheel-traffic, paved in suchwise that it encouraged the accumulation of puddles, it harboured a goodly portion of the back-wash of the city's refuse. His trade was of no exalted character, but consisted, for the most part, in quick sales and small returns on auction remainders. These he displayed on a stall outside his dingy door, and guarded so slackly that as many were stolen as paid for.

In this manner he contrived to scramble a desultory livelihood, and to study whatever of interest strolled across his path.

In halycon days Gabriel had often visited him with the careless, unconscious insolence of his class, patronizing and spending money, scarcely observing the object of his indulgence.

One December evening, when the streets were damp and the lamps just lit, he wandered through the Rampant Lion, and stopped at the familiar stall. It was near closing-time; Lanier was gathering up his belongings, and carrying them under cover. When Gabriel halted, he nodded curtly, and proceeded briskly with his task. Gabriel tarried, idly fingering page after page of the rapidly diminishing heap. His expedition had been peculiarly fruitless that day. He had dragged his tired steps from office to office, collecting up his rejected effusions, until, as evening fell, the sulphurous shadow of an incipient fog had found him footsore and heartsick upon the scene of his former prosperity.

What was the good of worrying? he asked himself as he picked over the time-worn refuse of many a shelf. All these tattered shreds had been penned and published in enthusiasm; and this was their nemesis—to be sold for a song from a rickety stall in an insignificant by-way. His father had been right after all; ambition was a will-o'-the-wisp in the guise of courage—the *Italiam fugientem* of the Trojan band. Hideous spectres of failure in London drifted to and fro at his side as thus he was standing; women with narrow chests and callous eyes; slouching men from out whose faces every trace of manhood had sped. A cowardly, ignoble comfort was far to be preferred, and even more admirable, he told himself. There was nothing to be gained but blows from strife.

A man of moods, he pictured himself as one of these off-scourings of civilization, and shuddered. It was the darkest hour of his despair ; the flashing flame of his hope had sunk very low.

From these mournful meditations he was aroused by Lanier, who, unbeknown to him, had been silently regarding him for some minutes.

“ If you have nothing else to do, you are welcome to step inside,” he said.

With the mechanical tread of one only half-awakened, he accepted the offer.

The interior of the shop was similar in appearance to a hundred others of its kind ; the ceiling low and smoke-begrimed, the floor littered with books, the shelves dusty and laden with leather-bound editions, one, two, and three hundred years old.

Here indeed was the metropolis of all literary endeavour, and the inferno. Hobbes and Hawthorne, Smollet and Mrs. Browning, Swinburne and Isaac Watts, stretched side by side, every difference of ideal, or lack of it, utterly forgotten in the sorry calamity which had overtaken them all. Here also was verified that old warning of every quest, that many shall be called but few chosen. Presentation copies of meritorious, though unknown, works strewed the counter, bulged over into the doorway, and soaked in the rain. Here were pages containing words of conviction which had not convicted, and optimisms of life uttered by lips which should know distress. In some of them were inscribed messages of affection from the author to his friend ; but the pages were uncut, proving the receiver’s amazing indifference. It is a bitter trial for the prophet when he is not honoured in his own country, how much more so when he is rejected in every other !—such had been their fate. All this came home to Gabriel as he halted in the entrance, surveying the dreary scene.

“If you don’t mind, I’m going to have supper, and should like you to join me if you have the time.” Lanier led the way into a cozy little room at the back.

In the grate crackled a cheery fire of generous proportions, lighting up the quaintly furnished low-browed room. The walls were heavily panelled with ancient oak, brown-stained by time, around which stood elaborately carved settles, each one of which in the making had occupied a year of some man’s life. At one end of the room, facing the hearth, was a curiously-wrought armoury, of fourteenth-century workmanship, with massive hinges of twisted iron upon which the fire flames shone. Above the mantel rose dim and shadowy a Spanish crucifix, inlaid with ivory and gold and pearl, the surface of which had been polished to brightness by trembling human lips which had long since ceased to fear. Perhaps, three hundred years gone by, mothers of Aragon had prayed to it for the safe homecoming of their sons from the Armada, which was fated never to return. Yellow-backed, vellum-bound volumes of monastic handiwork and Renaissance skill stood stacked in piles, and rose tier upon tier in the deep recesses of the walls. The windows were permanently boarded up, as Lanier afterwards explained, “to exclude the memory of the things outside.” It seemed to Gabriel that he had drifted back to Spenserian days; only the modern garb of his host reminded him of the modern age. With a look of mild surprise he gazed around, only half-believing that which he saw, so opposite was it to the paltry depravity which he had forsaken.

“Yes,” said Lanier, interpreting his thoughts, “it *is* different. I mean that it should be; this is my place of escape. Life would be intolerable without it. So soon as the shutters are up and the shop is closed, I retire in here to forget what I am, to dream of what I have desired to become.”

Here, then, was one who had created his own Eldorado in defiance of circumstance; having sought, he had not utterly failed.

"But it is so unlike anything that I had expected," said Gabriel.

"Of course it is," Lanier replied; "its oppositeness constitutes its charm. How do you suppose that I could contrive to exist, if it were not unlike?"

Gabriel sat himself down by the fire, and with lazy satisfaction watched Lanier preparing their meal. Supper consisted of *vin ordinaire*, cheese and brown bread; a simple substitute for the more elaborate article.

"So you have adopted the lost cause as a profession?" queried Lanier, glancing at the bunch of manuscript which Gabriel carried.

"Yes—and joined the holy army of martyrs, I fear," answered Gabriel, with a laugh.

Gradually his tongue unloosed. Here, at any rate, was a man who had gone upon a kindred quest, with a like result. The desire for confession came upon him, and he poured out to the dealer in second-hand books his troubles.

The little man heard him patiently to an end, and then said briefly—

"Show me what you have done."

Nervously fumbling with the knots, Gabriel untied his creations, and handed them over. The man accepted them in the casual manner of one who expects disappointment, merely remarking—

"Oh, verses! They never sell."

As he read on more interest was made manifest in his face, until at last he paused, in turning a sheet, exclaiming—

"Why, this is great!"

When he had finished, he returned them and was silent

a moment, contemplating action. Then, turning rapidly to Gabriel, he said—

“I have something to tell you. Who you are I hardly know, and I don’t much care. What you have already shown me is a sufficient recommendation. Your face is familiar to me. I can remember on several occasions dispatching books to you, to some address near Hyde Park, but that is all. You were rich then, I suppose?”

Gabriel nodded assent.

“That is the first essential,” said the bookseller mysteriously; “we accept no one who has not been poor. And you became poor through following your noblest desire? Good, that is the second essential. All that now remains is to submit your work to the others; from what I have seen of it, I am sure you will be elected.”

“To what?” asked Gabriel, bewildered by this half-speech.

“I am not at liberty to answer that question until you have actually been made a member. We hold a session to-night, when your name will be brought forward. If things turn out successfully you will hear from me within the week. If not, I shall have done you no great harm.”

“But——” began Gabriel.

“I am sorry,” said the bookseller, breaking in, “I am not at liberty to argue; rest assured that this night has been a turning-point in your career. The others will be here shortly, so I must ask you to leave. I will retain these verses of yours for the present.”

He had risen while speaking, and now led the way toward the street door. As he flung it open, he caught Gabriel by the arm, half fearful of losing him.

“On second thoughts, I think you had better return to this place in two days from now, about the same time. Wait until you see me closing up, then come and stand

by the stall, as you did this evening. If I say nothing, you can go away again, and forget all about it. If I nod to you, you must follow me in. That is all. Good-night."

The door clattered to, and the bolt shot into place.

Gabriel was left, standing alone in the deserted lane.

CHAPTER VIII

A NIGHT OF ILLUSION

FROM the cheering warmth of Lanier's secret hospice to the desolation of Rampant Lion Lane was too sudden a change.

The fog, which hitherto had only threatened, now deployed its shadowy legions with the stealthy strategy of an invading army, noiselessly tenanting the city, crowding every alley with its countless host. One might almost hear the myriad tread of its encroaching feet. Every sign of life was blotted out. London lay charred and blackened under glimmering lights—a huge bonfire burnt out. Shops were closed ; streets empty ; traffic abandoned ; everything, which had been so normal and familiar a few short hours ago, was changed.

Yet, for all the loneliness, Gabriel was conscious of a subtle horror that he was not alone. The air was angry with the pulsation of wings ; the lane echoed with whispering voices. Even while he stood thus bewildered, he felt the brush of a passing garment, and turned to see the startled face of a gutter loafer peering into his own—for one second only, then this also had vanished.

“It is the very night of illusion,” he muttered ; “everything has departed that once was, and I myself, a mere illusion, am the sole reality.”

The faintly remembered, haunting cry of Browning fled passionately back upon him, “Who knows but the world may end to-night ?”

“And what if it does?” he asked aloud. “I, for one, shall not mind. Life is too mysterious; it has wearied me. We are all tired. God grant that the world may end to-night.”

Every barrier of the reasonable broke down before this catastrophic phenomenon of Nature; an idea was no sooner conceived than his imagination saw it materialized. The world would end that night! These were the last few hours of his life. What did the convulsive shattering of his poor fortunes matter when the hope of the world lay a-dying!

He grew out of himself with the thought; he became the last thing living, the personification of Life. Griefs, and fears, and doubts, which had well-nigh submerged him when he had struggled to keep his head on high, now beat distantly about his feet, so tall was he grown.

He laughed aloud in these last hours of his giant activity: he had surely gathered up into himself the vitality of nations, and stood next in order unto God. “Who knows but the world may end to-night? It must end! It is going to end.”

He stretched out his arms in his imagined might, straining up through the fog towards the clouds; but trembled as he did so, feeling his hand upon a cold, damp face.

The face passed on, and he heard the report of three sharp raps with the naked knuckles upon wood, followed by the rattle of the handle of a door. A fagot of light flared up into the night. The face went in. The door swung to. All was dark again. Ten separate times he saw this operation repeated—the three raps, the handle turned, and the streak of light. The house was Lanier’s; Gabriel instinctively knew that these proceedings stood in some way related to himself. Who were they? Where did they come from?

“They are my old sins,” he told himself, “who are

come to witness and mock at the virtues which I have only written, and have not wrought into the fabric of my life."

For a long time he waited, but the door did not reopen.

He turned and groped his passage to the top of the lane, and so out into the main street.

It took him fully three hours to stumble his way back to the Turnpike; when, after many mistakes, he at last reached Lancaster's house, he found it in total darkness.

Throughout his journey his fanciful illusion had pursued him, increasing in intensity, so that he had hardly hoped to find the Weeping Woman still standing. In proportion as his search grew tedious and its conclusion further postponed, an hysteric desire rose up within him to see again those people who had been kind to him, and who had received from him so little thanks.

As his loneliness grew intolerable and his feet more weary, a contemplative self-pity took the place of his recent wild exaltation, causing him to yearn for some one who knew and cared for him. Hysteria became frenzy, so that he ran the last mile in desperate hurry, fearing that he might never arrive, or arrive too late. He was dimly conscious of sackcloth-coloured shadow-shapes who came upon him suddenly, and who stared resentfully at his retreating figure. They seemed to be conspiring to detain him; wherefore, when he saw one approaching, he ran at it with all his might, and passing it over, rushed on. Far behind he heard the sound of pursuing feet, which only urged him to speedier endeavour. Reaching the Weeping Woman, he thrust his key into the latch and, entering, closed the door. Halting, with panting breath, he heard hurrying feet draw near and pass. He breathed again, knowing that he was safe.

The house was very quiet. With terrible foreboding, he leapt up the stairs, and flung himself into the room where they were used to sit together.

As he did so, a woman rose from a kneeling posture beside the window, leaving the panes clear of mist where her face had been pressed.

She ran toward him with arms outstretched, crying, "Oh, it is you at last! I was so afraid."

For a moment Gabriel said nothing, but stood still, clasping her close to himself, kissing the face which he could not see. His heart was racked with the craving for love; nothing mattered much, if only that were gratified. He could not see the face, nor did he desire. Here was a human creature famished for love, like himself; that knowledge sufficed.

Bending lower, he kissed the lips, and whispered, "Who knows, the world may end to-night."

When he spoke, a tremor travelled through her body, and she slipped from his embrace, still holding his hands.

"Oh, Gabriel, Gabriel, what mistake is this?"

The voice was Hilda's; but the longing for love was upon him, vague and directionless. There was no space for reasoning; he kissed her hands many times and she did not resist.

Content with the comfort of the present, her lips ceased from complaining, and she lay very still.

Sitting down by her side, he rested her head upon his shoulder gently, as she had been a tired child in need of sleep. He recognized from their touch how hard the fragile hands had worked. He reproached himself with bitter words for his past carelessness of her needs; but she said nothing.

Her silence brought to him calm, till he also, exhausted with contentions which he could not explain, refrained from speech. All remembrance of yesterday and to-

morrow vanished ; for the mere pleasure of repose he was happy to rest. As mariners escaped from a sunken vessel who, having attained the shore, stretch their length upon the sand within sound of the waves, pleased with the scant security which they have won, forgetful of all else, so were these two maimed refugees in the darkened room.

For a brief space they remained thus, when a second key grated in the latch, and footsteps were heard ascending.

Gabriel and Hilda, without moving, awaited their approach, recognizing the trailing tread of the weary feet as that of Lancaster.

He came to the open doorway, halted, and seemed to gaze in. If he saw anything, he did not speak ; but, after a moment of suspense, renewed his journey ; with the closing of his bedroom door, quiet returned.

Then with a stifled sob Hilda stood up, and laying her hand upon Gabriel's arm, whispered, " Gabriel, we must forget that this has occurred. I don't know how it happened. I had been waiting for John, and did not recognize you at first. I was very frightened, and hardly knew what I was doing—and, I had been very lonely."

" And I am still lonely," he said.

The fog had now lifted, and the interrupted energy of life was heard to swirl and eddy down the street afresh.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE OF THE DREAMERS OF DREAMS

WITH the passage of that night the old order was resumed. None of the occupants of the Weeping Woman manifested by word or sign that anything out of the ordinary had happened. Lancaster was gentle and self-effacing as ever. Hilda, sedate and tender, with just a strange, protecting touch of the maternal in her attitude toward Gabriel. Gabriel himself was hilarious and moody by turns. Despite this outer covering of harmony, he endured the exquisite torments of self-acknowledged and convicted hypocrisy. When Lancaster was sociable he was unhappy, recalling his disloyalty of an hour. When Lancaster was silent, he was haunted by the fear of a further knowledge, which his friend did not choose to make plain. Beyond all else, there was the humiliating shame that he should be beholden to one whom he had secretly betrayed.

By nature Gabriel was spontaneous and frank, even to the point of recklessness; to be compelled to deceive was for him the worst penalty that could have befallen. If he had only had himself to consider, he would willingly have gone to Lancaster and clean-breasted the whole matter like a man; as it was, he had Hilda to safeguard, and was forced to keep silent. When he walked in the open, amid the good-humoured rattle of the streets, he would smile and say, "A mistake on a dark night—what does it

amount to?" When he returned, and witnessed the stern, sacrificing purity of his friend's life, such joyous arguments appealed in vain. He soon arrived at the conclusion that, since he was debarred from confession, there was nothing left to him but an unexplained flight; to live with a locked heart, side by side with two people whom he loved, was more than he could endure.

If Lancaster had only come to him in his accustomed, trustful way, and said, "I saw you when I stood upon the threshold," he would have been happy. He did not come, and Gabriel lay crushed beneath the interminable suspense.

One future gleam remained—the fulfilment of Lanier's mysterious promise. He smiled cynically, even while he clung to this last trestle of the broken bridge, remembering how he had been accustomed to overlook this man, allotting him no humblest place in the world of his acquaintance, contemplating him merely as one of those convenient, sexless, opinionless automats whom God has so kindly situated in this world for our service. A few short months are not sufficient to eradicate life-long impressions; still less when the holder of them happens to be young and the impressions themselves false. He still cherished a mild disdain for Lanier, even when he could look for help from no other quarter. He despised himself for despising; he despised himself for accepting from one whom he unrighteously despised; and, with an aristocratic harking back to more arrogant days, trebly despised himself for accepting anything from Lanier at all.

So the intervening days of misery dragged by, until he again found himself standing beside the bookseller's stall. The barren poverty of the alley, with its decrepit, tumble-down shop, the waning London light, the sordid foot-passengers, and abused relics of scattered libraries, looked so forlornly prosaic that he was more than half-tempted to make his escape. While he was hovering between two

minds, Lanier came out and nodded; beckoning at the same time with his hand, he disappeared into the darkness within. Gabriel followed with a beating heart.

“You have been elected,” exclaimed Lanier excitedly. “I knew you would be. I was certain of it directly I saw your writings.”

“Been elected to what?” asked Gabriel, enthusing at his fervour.

“Why, to ‘The Dreamers of Dreams.’ Ah, but I forgot, you don’t know who they are; I shall have to explain. Walk into the Sanctuary, and wait there a minute. I’ll go and close up the shop.”

Gabriel entered the quaint old room which had so fascinated him on the last occasion, and sat himself down by the fire, where he was soon joined by Lanier.

“And now, who are ‘The Dreamers of Dreams’?” asked Gabriel.

“You must give me time to explain,” replied Lanier, “and you must listen closely, if you wish to understand the honour which they have conferred upon you. ‘The Dreamers of Dreams’ form an anonymous club which meets in this house twice every week. It is secret in nature. Its existence is unknown to any, save its own members. The members themselves are not supposed to be known to one another by their real names, nor are they allowed to recognize one another should they meet outside these walls, unless the introduction be obtained from without. They are also supposed to be quite unaware of all save one another’s emotional past and present, so that they may be left unconstrained to utter their dreams without fear of misunderstanding or contradiction by reason of that past. To this general rule one exception is allowed, when we find ourselves capable of being helpful to one of our members in the brutal world outside.

“In this way the few hours we spend together week by

week become for us a kind of materialized subjective life ; a quiet, timeless garden, if you like, to which we may escape and live importantly only those delicate, shadowy ideals which other people regard as non-essentials.

“There are two ways of prospering ; the one, by making use of the world ; the other, by making use of oneself. There are two ways of becoming happy : the one, by marching out and capturing the material wherewithals for sensuous gratification ; the other, by marching in, denying the world, and finding the senses of the soul a sufficient pleasure in themselves. The first requires wealth ; of the second the poorest man is capable.

“Here we have established the only permanent kind of happiness ; happiness based upon knowledge of our own selves and ignorance of all that is not best in others. We are not long enough together to discover each other’s incessant faults, nor to discriminate between virtues which are only ambitions, and those which are of daily practice.

“You may think it strange at first that men should come together for such a purpose ; but you will gradually learn to understand.

“For some men their secret desires after perfection are far more lofty than their spoken professions ; many men’s spoken professions than their normal practice ; most men’s normal practice than the estimate held of them by their closest friends. To the sensitive, that this should be, is a bitter grief ; more especially because it frequently happens that, out of sheer chagrin at the impossibility of their surroundings and themselves, their actions become more gross in proportion as their aspirations increase in exaltation. Notwithstanding, we are all judged by our outward expressions.

“How shall men find a kinder place, neighbouring on their dream-life, where perfection is within easier reach, and brother-men are more charitable ? By artists this

problem is often solved by relegating the higher self to a phantom world, populated by dream-people, fashioned from the best of Heart's Desire; while, in the world of standards and facts, only their baser self is realized. Such men are very unhappy; from this cause many a prophet has died profligate.

"It seemed possible to some few of us to found here in the throng of London a Land of Heart's Desire, where dreamers might dream in sympathy, with none to challenge. That this might be, every earthly axiom of what is plausible, religious, or respectable, had to be left behind. The door had to be fast-locked against every straggler of *things as they exist*, in order that those within might fabricate their visions of *things as they should be*. Hence the rules which I have communicated to you.

"No opinion is dealt with unkindly or as impossible. With us everything is possible, therefore we can afford to be generous. Among our members are some who are leaders in the world of art, and music, and literature; and some who never will be, but who share in the Desire—like myself.

"Some of us are quite poor, and some quite rich; some are quite famous, and some utterly unknown. These things do not count with us, for we dream in a land where money and fame are inexpensive. We have no sooner to think, than we have; to mention, than we visualize; to visualize, than we discover existent. All this is very simple when once the world has been forsaken. Now do you understand?"

While Lanier had been speaking, Gabriel had listened intently, his eyes sparkling and his cheeks flushed, as one who stands accused of his most hidden secrets.

"Yes, yes, I see," he panted. "You judge a poet by what he says in his supremest utterance; not by what he does in his direst temptation. Me, by what I have

written; not by what I am. By refusing to see any reason for despite, you will cleanse me of my faults, and will educate me, by your high estimate of me, into a genius and goodness which I do not as yet possess. I am to live before you in my superb elations only; not in my dingiest passions. This is the world for which I have dreamed, and longed, and hoped, but never hoped to see."

The travelled road was forgotten. London, and all the sundry sorrows which it entailed, the nauseous streets, the garish nights, the tumultuous days, had faded out from sight; the unattainable was attained, the unreal had been realized. This was the haven of his quest, the reward of his sacrifice, the explanation of his torment.

"From henceforward," said Lanier, "you must tell me nothing of your former life. I may wish to know many things; all I am allowed to know is the self which is revealed in your moments of ecstasy. To-night the club meets; I will leave you to prepare for their coming."

Having thrown a log upon the fire of coals, he set about his task. Candles were lighted, benches arranged, and silver tankards of curious workmanship placed upon the long, low table.

As he gave the finishing touch, three taps were heard upon the outer door, and the rattle of the handle. Lanier picked up his lantern and went out to admit his guest. Gabriel waited in trepidation.

The first arrival was a long, lean man of sixty years and upwards. His face was thin, delicate, and clean-shaven; his hair grey and spreading down to his shoulders; his eyes bright and palely blue. He was evidently thriving, being warmly clad in a rich fur coat, and attired with a scrupulous and expensive neatness. So soon as he appeared, Gabriel recognized him as a leading novelist of the day, and successful man of letters.

Having removed his outer garment, he sat down without speech, on the farther side of the fire-place, opposite to Gabriel, and having lit his pipe, stared vacantly into the glowing coals.

Following, in rapid succession upon his advent, came man after man ; young, and old, and middle-aged ; prosperous and painfully poor ; well-dressed and shabby, until at last the room was comfortably filled to the number of perhaps a dozen.

One, beyond all others, interested Gabriel. A man, small and slender, with a face half timid, half defiant, but of a singular and wistful sweetness. A possible saviour ; an only too obvious rake. One of whom many things might once have been predicted, no one of which would have been entirely fulfilled. His was the countenance of a disillusioned man who still clung desperately to his illusion ; who had striven to forsake the world, but had returned to abuse it ; one who revived his visions only to find them utterly vain. He had the face of a seeker who has lost something which he is for ever agonizing to regain. He taught others in his silence the hopelessness of all effort ; when he spoke, his enthusiasm revealed the joy of the enterprise. You recognized at once in looking upon him that he was one to whom laurels do not come in a lifetime, though they may come after death. All that men hope for, all that they journey after, the unfulfilment of love, the contrition for misspent years, the horror which follows a too accurate knowledge of self, and torture of an endless desire, were pencilled there by the brutal hand of physical retribution. This was the Poet, the lover of Verlaine, who, some few years since, so startled the cultured world by the melancholy of the fragmentary songs which were published after his death. At this time he was far gone upon the downward road.

Until they were all assembled nothing was said ; but, as

the last arrival entered, the party broke up into various happy groups.

One after another they approached Gabriel to welcome him, speaking kind and cheering words concerning his work, and all in such a gentle and unaffected way that his heart went out to them.

At supper he heard men discussing their ambitions and ideals for one another, and humanity in general, with a greater trust and frankness than he had dared to use, even when meditating with himself. The most evident feature in their conversation was its entire lack of bitterness or controversy. The most preposterous theories were sincerely stated, and as sincerely accepted. Between every man there existed a bond of sympathy which compelled harmony.

Charity and forbearance had welded together these separate thinking organisms till they feigned the accord of one mind.

Later in the evening Gabriel found himself the companion of the Poet.

"I congratulate you upon your verses," he said in a low, musical voice; "they are true, and express all that such unfortunates as myself have tried in vain to utter."

Gabriel looked up with an answering smile. "I am glad that you should think so," he said. "I am very young, and scarcely deserve such praise."

"Youth is no cause for blame," his friend replied; "it is a mistake which Time is eager to rectify; and those who have corrected it in themselves anxious to regain. Youth is the fitting season for sadness—sadness combined with an angry hope; from these two are fashioned the greatest poets. Dream long dreams; let no discouragement deter you; thither lies the road to success in poetry. Not at first, perhaps, will you succeed, but afterwards, when you have experienced the sorrows of which you have sung.

That is the terrible thing about being a poet. As a boy, you sing of agonies which you have only imagined ; when you are old, and have forgotten your song, you endure them. Poetry is prophetic ; it all comes true in the end. Blessed are they who, having framed the song, are content to sing it with their lives. Therefore, there is reason to be careful in what you sing. My songs were mostly of the wrong sort ; I am now living them—now that I am old.”

This last was said with a regretful sadness, which lingered recallingly, like the last faint throb of the violin. Long after he had ceased to speak, Gabriel was painfully conscious of the presence of his words.

“ You speak sadly,” he said. “ I wish I could help you.”

“ No one can help the weak man but himself. I am capable of dreaming, but not of doing ; of striving, but not of achieving ; of accomplishing everything, save only myself. Having told others how to be brave, I am cowardly ; a coward I have lived, and a coward I shall die. I have made the fatal mistake of being afraid of life. Tell yourself that you are what you are not ; let it be high, and that you will surely become. That is the great secret.”

“ And yet you can dream ? ”

“ Yes, a little, but even that is going from me. Under the influence of drink I can dream—not without it. If I told what I then saw, no one outside these walls would believe me.”

“ What do you see ? ” asked Gabriel. “ I, at least, will believe you.”

The Poet turned upon him inquiring eyes, already misty with the fumes of drink.

“ I see myself young,” he said.

“ Young ! ” echoed Gabriel.

“ Yes, young again,” he replied. “ No one will believe that I have ever been young ; yet I have, and shall be so again. Death may end many things ; it cannot end life.

I shall come back wise and strong, with an unwasted youth, and then shall cry aloud all that once I meant to say—the truths which now I can only mutter. Life does not end with death ; it ends with love, and love I have never forsaken. These many years have I sought in vain for one perfect woman who would love as I could love ; I have not found her. I did nearly once, but I was mistaken. I brought her the dregs of my life. She was too proud, too conscious, too scrupulous in her abandonment. In this existence the search is overlate ; but life does not end with death, and I shall find her.”

“Have you ever seen her ?” asked Gabriel.

“Yes, many times. The first, when I was quite a little lad and stood alone upon a headland, facing the sunset. She came to me when it was growing dark, and I played with her. When I told others my secret, they did not understand. How should they ? As I grew older she came to me more frequently ; whenever I was alone and had watched the sunset, I felt her near. Many times have I tried to detain her, but never with success. And now she is leaving me. But I shall find her sometime—somewhere.”

“Does she come to you now ?”

“Rarely ; that is why I drink, in order that I may rise beyond myself, and grow courageous—then she comes.”

“What does she look like ?”

“Her hair used to be flaxen, but as I have grown older, it has grown darker ; when it is quite black I shall die. I hope it will be soon, for then I shall become young again, and I shall find her.”

“How do you know all this ?”

“Because there is quiet in the grave. She always came to me when I was quiet. Lately I have been disturbed about many things—about growing old, and failure, and drink ; but when I am quite quiet she will come to me and stay.”

“And afterwards?”

“Who knows but that even I may be happy?”

“Is this the only way in which to win poetic fame?”

“The only way for me. I have sung about her, and prayed about her, and still dream of her. When I am dead, men will read the words which I have uttered, and some will say that she is Virtue, and some will call her the Spirit of Life, and some Love; but they will never know her, for she will be with me.”

“And that will suffice?”

“That will be sufficient.”

As he spoke, he rose to go, and Gabriel with him.

The moon rode high in the heavens, and showed white between the slanting chimney-tops, looking down disdainful and remote upon these two dreamers.

When they had reached the top of the lane, the Poet held out his hand at parting, repeating, “I shall find her sometime—somewhere.”

“God is just, you will certainly find her,” whispered Gabriel, as he watched the retreating figure die out in the level of the long, unlovely street.

CHAPTER X

WHEN YOUNG MEN SEE VISIONS

NEXT morning Gabriel rose earlier than usual. The air was crisp and sharp. There had been a fall of snow in the night, just sufficient to change the sordid array of roofs upon which his window gazed into a dazzling, fantastic land of white. "It is an omen," he thought, "that all will be well. If one night of snow can blot out centuries of ugliness, why should not one night of dreaming do as much for me? Where is the good of being a poet if you cannot triumph over circumstance? Why should not I, remembering this sight, always find it present when I gaze from this window, even on the drearest day? I have made the mistake of recalling out of my past only my nights. From henceforward I will make it my rule to memorize the exquisite alone; to forget all else, and so to impose my idealized memories upon my actual present that I may find them always looking through at me, and them only. I will be my own wishing-stone, and my wish shall be that all the world may be beautiful. I will presuppose that every one is young, and so see old women in their girlhood; and that everybody is good, and discover them as once they might have been. I will read this world around me as we read one another last night at the Dreamers of Dreams, exploring only that which is best. By so doing I shall ultimately come to find that everybody and everything is beautiful, and is good, and is pure. I have learned yet another secret."

Down-stairs the family was assembled when he arrived and in addition an out-of-work clerk and a day-labourer—Lancaster's garnerings of the previous night.

Gabriel was in high spirits, and determined upon putting his new philosophy—the moulding of the world-without by the imagery-within—to the test.

He talked much and kindly, addressing himself repeatedly to the two strangers, until their reticence melted away, and they laughed, and bared themselves as to an old friend.

When we say that any one is uninteresting, we really condemn ourselves, and mean that we have been too shallow or unsympathetic to encourage and call forth the essential man who hides behind the mask. Either sorrow or sudden happiness can teach us this lesson. In Gabriel's instance it was happiness. Every one that morning, under his influence, laid aside disguise and became, for the time being, genuine.

The day-labourer told about his old mother in the distant village, and described the country festivals. The out-of-work clerk spoke of how he had hoped to become a merchant prince, and still hoped; also of the wife and children whom he had left at a friend's house, together with his few poor savings, till he should come into earnings again; also of the splendid amends he intended to make them when that day should arrive.

Kate, whose case had seemed so desperate, and whose artificiality so dense that every trace of sincerity seemed to have vanished, now woke up and astonished her friends by the gentleness of her buried life. Her whole manner was altered; she treated these two waifs with such considerate pity that at times they seemed to be aware of her alone. While they were talking she performed small acts of kindness to disembarass their awkwardness, and make them less restrained.

To Lancaster, this was a revelation. He had tried to do so much for her and to no purpose, only to see a change wrought by a few minutes' conversation, and not over-serious conversation at that.

The meal ended. The clerk wound his untidy muffler, his one protection against the cold, around his neck, and, turning up his frayed collar, faced Gabriel, saying huskily, "Thank you, sir."

"What for?" asked Gabriel.

"I don't know," he replied, and seized his hand.

"Thank you, yer honour," said the day-labourer.

"What are you thanking me for?" asked Gabriel, smiling.

"Damned if I know," said the day-labourer, with a sob.

Kate went busily and smiling about her work, humming a little tune, which Lancaster remembered having heard her sing long years ago, something absurdly childish about a nightingale and a flower.

When they had all gone, he approached Gabriel and said, "You have done something of which I am quite incapable; I don't know what it was, but it was good. I want to thank you for it."

"I refused to see their frailties," Gabriel answered gently; "it is not difficult when one is determined to be happy."

After he had left the room, and was passing along the darkened passage, a hand was laid lightly upon his arm, and a voice whispered, "If you had always been to us that which you are to-day, that other thing would not have happened."

Recognizing Hilda's voice, and being taken aback, he questioned, "What other thing?"

"Oh, the heart-weariness," she sighed; and he knew what she meant.

CHAPTER XI

SEEING THE WORLD AS WHITE

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and a shrill, bleak wind was blowing. Since the departure of the day-labourer and the out-of-work clerk, Gabriel had employed his morning in capturing and setting down in verse that pleasant philosophy, which the whiteness of the snow had suggested to him, concerning the fashioning of the world-without by the imagery-within—the impressing of his subjective mood upon the objective world. He was pleased with himself, for he knew that he had accomplished an excellent piece of work. Having wrapped himself in his warmest clothing, he set off at a brisk pace down the Turnpike.

“Now,” he said, “I must put the truth of my discovery to the test, and see whether I have not been mistaken in supposing that men are unhappy, and that London is a dreary land of grey. To me they seemed so formerly because I myself was wretched; now that I am cheerful they will seem otherwise. The world is what we make it.”

On his left hand, drawn up beside the pavement, stood costers' barrows. Their owners were evidently divided in mind as to whether it were more expedient to vend their wares or to keep their bodies warm. Some paced up and down, stamping their feet, chafing their swollen hands, and letting out hoarse cries. “Brices! Brices! Gen'lman's brices! All o' one price. Choose where yer likes. Buy 'em,

they never brikes." Upon which broke in a shrieking woman's voice, "Cabbages! cabbages! Fresh cabbages!" Near by, a frozen-looking man invited the public in wheedling tones to "come and 'ave their photos taken and show their picture to the wife." Others, less brave, had retired to the leeward of their stalls and there huddled above diminutive coke fires. As he listened and watched, it came home to Gabriel that for these people the world was a harsh dwelling-place and life a continuous sordid fight. Was it so very different for himself, he asked. At the top of their voices they offered the world braces, cabbages, and photos, which the world did not wish to buy; in more modest tones he offered poetry and ideals, which were himself. The world mocked and ignored both him and them. These were facts which, at present, he would not acknowledge. "The world is what we make it," he said, and smiled. To see the Turnpike as white required a strong imagination; for the tireless throng of traffic, which had traversed the street since early dawn, had churned the snow into treacherous oozy slime, which caused the feet of the thinly shod to feel very numb. Everybody looked tattered and depressed to-day, like Xenophon's ten thousand returning from this lost fight. Ha! the lost fight. And was life really a defeat, after all? He threw up his head and stepped out more briskly. "Not for me," he told himself. Just then a half-clad child, sobbing with cold and misery, crept shivering by. He stopped. "What's the matter, little chap?" he asked. But the child had been trained in the school of terror, perhaps of crime; he ran aside, dived beneath the horses' heads, and so escaped.

"The world is what we make it," whispered a jeering voice within his brain. "You know what that means, if other people don't; you told us all about it in the poem which you wrote this morning. If it be true, come, prove it now. Fashion this detestable world-without by the

imagery-within. Impress your glorious subjective mood upon the Turnpike. The world is what we make it ; you ought to know that."

"Who can dream dreams in the Turnpike?" he growled, angry because he knew that already, at the first contact with facts, he was losing his new-found peace of mind. "I'll go to Lanier's," he said, "where ideals are not shattered." When he entered Rampant Lion Lane and approached the bookshop, his spirits rose, for he was encouraged by memories of the previous night. Lanier sat behind his counter, far away in a vanished land, chuckling over an original copy of Fuller's *Worthies of England*. When Gabriel halted in the doorway, shutting out the scanty light, he looked up.

"Ah, so it's you!" he said. "I had been hoping that I might see you to-day. Perhaps unconsciously I drew you to me by my desire." Then he told him that the Poet had been there, anxiously inquiring for him that morning. He had left a message for Gabriel that, should he turn up at the Rampant Lion, he should come straight on to his house.

"What does he want with me?" he asked.

"Don't know," Lanier replied; "I should advise you, however, to go to him as quickly as you are able. He's a valuable friend to have."

So Gabriel, having no other engagement, agreed to visit him that afternoon. He felt a little nervous when he looked at the address which Lanier had handed to him. It was somewhere near Hyde Park. A short time ago he had been at home in all neighbourhoods of wealth and fashion; since then he had become a denizen of the Turnpike, one who rapped upon the closed doors of publishers' houses, and had unconsciously acquired that angry attitude of grudging respect toward the well clothed and fully fed which is the brand of the man who has

owned himself as poor. He looked down at his clothes, and acknowledged them to be threadbare and shabby. He wondered bitterly whether he had yet gained the appearance of a broken man.

“Pshaw!” he exclaimed. “I’m drifting back into my old mood of wretchedness. I must learn to be happy in my visions, that I may see the world as white.”

A young girl, ill-fed and anæmic, staggering under a burden far too heavy for her weak strength, passed him. He turned round, gazing after her; then followed.

When he had caught her up he took the bundle from her, saying, “Come, little friend, you have no right to be carrying such a load; let me help you.”

She looked up at him with frightened eyes, holding out her trembling hands distrustfully, inclined to snatch it back.

“It’s all right,” he said, interpreting her fear; “I only want to help you. Tell me, for where are you bound?”

She mentioned the name of a firm of mantua-makers in Regent Street. They set off together, elbowing their way through the fashionable throng. The little girl, for she was scarcely more than a child, still kept one hand upon the package, misdoubting any kindness which had no ulterior interest. Gabriel essayed to converse with her, but, what with the traffic and her pitiful stupidity, did not get very far; he soon gave up the attempt. When at last they came to the shop, she seized her parcel and departed without a word of thanks. He watched her enter, and wondered what kind of a life hers could be; she was so frail and so obviously over-worked. “A crucified world and a crucified Creator,” he thought; and then, in a long-drawn sigh, “Poor world.” Very suddenly he became conscious of the uncomfortable sensation that some one was looking at him. He wheeled round sharply upon his heel; with such alacrity, indeed, that he came into collision with a saunter-

ing clubman, who straightway commenced to glare and expostulate. But Gabriel had picked out instinctively from the torrent of faces the scrutinizing eyes which had touched him. A temporary stoppage had occurred in the traffic. Directly opposite stood a brougham, in which sat three girls, one of whom was gazing at him. He instantly recognized the carriage as that of the 'Thurms', and the girl as Helen. Even as he espied her she bent forward with heightened colour and said something to the coachman, who, evidently obeying her command, circled his horses to the outside, thus filling up a gap in the halt, and hiding her from view. She must have seen his recent companion and his shabby load.

"I suppose she was afraid I would recognize her," he said bitterly. "She might have spared herself that trouble ; I had already learnt my lesson." And yet, his heart was sore, and, though he would not own it even to himself, the agony of an old desire was upon him. The extravagance of her furs, the repose of her figure, together with the radiant beauty of her face, gave to her an air of remoteness which contrasted strangely with his own present condition and past memories of that last night, spent in her company, by the silent Thames. They seemed so utterly apart, these two women who passed for one and the same ; from the one whom he had loved, the estrangement seemed so forlornly complete. He, the poor pedestrian, companion of a dressmaker's employée ; she, the symbol of caste, and of Parnassian patrician ease.

"But she does not know life," he muttered ; "how should she ? She has not suffered." Better by far to be the friend of a seamstress, he thought, if, by so doing, he might bring joy into the world, than to be the comrade of beautiful women, and live only to admire. How selfish he had been, spending his days idly for his pleasures, while such weak children as this one, whom he had lately helped,

laboured and were lonely. What price was too great to pay, if he might only learn to sing those songs which would bring comfort to such social cripples as these? Oh, to give sad people a song to sing! This must be his desire. He would go the softlier all the days of his life for the learning of such a song; but others would be happier by reason of his pain. And yet, the eyes of Helen! He could not forget them. There was something other than cruelty and despising in their gaze; they reawakened all the voices which he was striving to forget.

Thus, while he sought for an argument which would explain the world, the December daylight drifted into dark. When he entered Hyde Park, going toward the Poet's house, the yellow London street lamps were rippling into glory, like marigolds which toss their heads in the cool evening of the deep green grass. He was infected by that aching melancholy which London, in one of its many moods, is best able of all great cities to impart. He realized that he was only one of the six millions, each unit of which had its separate personality, who had that day gone ambitiously about their individual tasks through those same grey thoroughfares. He recalled and pictured their excited haste and fancied self-importance. What though they had hurried and laid waste their strength, how much had they really accomplished? he asked. Of what profit would this day and all its labours be when five hundred years had passed? Of what value would his own life, howsoever spent, prove to the world when five hundred years had passed? Nay, if he himself at that distant age, retaining a consciousness of such things as were ancient, should call to mind the hopes and fears of his present self, would he not smile contemptuously at these, his present tribulations, as a grown man finds matter for jest in the sins and chastisements of his childhood—those sorrows which cast such long shadows once and

extinguished all his stars? Gabriel was oppressed with the immensity of Creation as compared with the paltry items of which it is made up—of which he was only one item. He was made fretful by the remembrance of his own insignificance, which London had forced upon him. He recognized himself as a mere unit, which, so far as he knew, would occur but once in the rank and file of the myriad march of Time. London had humiliated him and robbed him of his confidence. This was his frame of mind when he arrived at the Poet's house. Its windows were gloomy and shuttered; it seemed deserted. He mounted the steps and rang.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN IN THE SHADOWLAND

THE door was opened by a young boy of extraordinary beauty. This much Gabriel noticed by the aid of the street lamp, for the hallway within was dark. He had evidently been prepared for Gabriel's arrival, for, asking no questions, he immediately led the way in silence up several flights of stairs, going toward the uppermost and backward regions of the house. As he followed, although he could see nothing, Gabriel had the feeling of being in a building uninhabited and unfurnished. The floors and stairways were uncarpeted; the walls, where he brushed them in his passage, were naked of pictures or of hangings; the air was unbreathed, and cold as the air without. He began to repent of his coming. If he had not seen the face of his guide he would certainly have questioned his own safety, and have turned back. Having arrived at the topmost stair, the boy turned about and motioned to Gabriel that he should halt, while he himself passed on and knocked at a door which was bound with iron. Some one answered, and the lock was turned from the inside. The boy touched Gabriel upon the arm, and they entered together. The room was unlighted, save for a great fire-place where a pile of wood, supported crosswise upon two brazen dogs, sputtered and was consumed in short, quick flames. The air was thick with the fragrance of hothouse flowers: standing in squat bowls and tall

vases were lilies, roses, and carnations of every shade and kind. Casting his eyes around the room, he saw that its walls were tapestried from floor to ceiling, covering up every window, if any there were. The subject of the tapestry was the hopeless loves of the world; that of Launcelot for Guinevere, of Paolo for Francesca, and of Merlin for Vivienne. Its furnishing had in it nothing of the present; all had been made three hundred years gone by, when men wrought not only with their hands but with their souls, putting immortal pride into their work, so that, though they were long since dead, it was still possible to witness the fineness of their every tool mark. Growing more accustomed to the light, he raised his head and saw above him the open sky with all its anchored stars, like a great harbour wherein the many ships of diverse ports have come to rest; the ceiling was one pane of polished glass. His companion, leaving him to his own devices, went toward the fire and rearranged the logs. Gabriel watched him as he stooped above the flames, and again wondered at his beauty and his silence. As he was standing thus, he heard a sound behind him, and turning about found the Poet at his side.

“So you have come,” he said, gazing on him fixedly, as he would impress each feature on his mind.

“Yes, I have come.”

“I knew that you would come; I have wished for you all day.” The Poet still looked upon him intently, neither offering him his hand, nor stirring from his place. Somehow, to Gabriel’s eyes, he appeared changed from the decrepid, prematurely aged man of the previous night. His face was lit up with a new emotion and looked no longer apologetic and afraid; he seemed rather like one who was inspired and had been made bold by some hidden message. The boy, having completed his task, shifted from his stooping position and stood upright.

This recalled the Poet to himself. Speaking eagerly and almost in a whisper, as one who communicates a secret, he said, "Do you recall those lines which a brother of ours once wrote ?

‘Stand still, true poet that you are !
I know you ; let me try and draw you ;
Some night you’ll fail us : when afar
You rise, remember one man saw you,
Knew you, and named a star !’

“That is what I want to say to you to-night. It was because I wanted to tell you this that I sent for you. I felt that those words were true of you the moment that I looked upon your face. I saw in you the pain of the prophet to whom men have not hearkened. But they will hearken. They will come together and will praise you, when you have fought and won and forgotten your lonely fight. At that time you will not need their praise ; but you hunger for it now, and because it is lacking, you grow faint. Therefore I have sent for you, that I, who am a poet, may tell you that at this time I have discovered the great poet hidden in your eyes. When I have failed, and am dead, and lie huddled in the mould of some obscure grave, and you are succeeding in our common quest, riding as a champion throughout God’s stars, I want you to promise that you will remember me and this night ; that it was I who first named you, and discerned you for what you are.” A new quality had come into his voice, one of strangling expectancy, of pleading, of excitement ; his habitual despair and lethargy were gone. For the moment his prayer seemed answered : he was young again. He stood tense and quivering, waiting for Gabriel to answer him. But Gabriel was struck dumb by his vehemence. He could not speak. His throat felt grown up and his breath came with difficulty. He could scarcely restrain himself from hysteric laughter when he recalled

the meanness of the troubles which dogged his daily walk in life, and contrasted them with the preposterous generosity and magnificent sincerity of this sudden recognition of that which he himself, in his insaner moments, had fancied that he was. He looked down at his shabby clothes, and frayed cuffs, and worn shoes, and smiled almost incredulously.

"Ah, but promise me," the Poet insisted. "Believe me that I am not mistaken."

"If what you prophesy should ever come to pass," Gabriel answered, "I will forget neither you nor this night. And though you should be mistaken, I will always remember."

"But you yourself know that what I say is true."

"Yes, I know; but the world does not recognize."

"Then we must compel the world."

"And have you found that so easy a task? Even John Keats could not compel the world in his own lifetime, neither did Shelley."

"But no one said to them that which I have said to you. No one unreservedly owed to them the starlight that was in their eyes."

"Poor Keats! If you could have spoken these words to him, what a difference they might have made!"

"And what a difference they still may make! Perhaps he did not need them so much as you. Perhaps I was born only for this, that I might tell you that you are one of those men for whom the ages halt."

"If I could only believe that this were true," said Gabriel, "I could be brave beneath the rods of any fate."

"Fate," the Poet said sadly, "is the generic name which cowards give to the penalties of their crimes. I myself have sought to avoid my conscience by taking refuge in that doctrine of fate. I am grown wiser. Now I am assured that, whatever went on in the hinder-world, we

create ourselves in this. We become the creatures of our choice. Dreams and desires take substance in our flesh. The persistent dreamer of nobilities may always dream true."

"Then teach me how I may realize in myself that thwarted prophecy which you have recognized?"

"I can best do that," said the Poet, "by speaking to you of my own life."

As he said this the old bewildered look crept out across his face; his figure seemed to shrink and his shoulders to stoop; the years, which his eagerness had thrown off, rolled back on him again. He moved slowly over to the fireplace and seated himself, stretching out his hands to the flame. The boy, crouching at his feet, rested his head against the Poet's knees. Gabriel sat himself down upon the opposite side of the hearth, watching them, and wondering what fantastic bond of sympathy had drawn these two together into the shuttered house with the one exquisitely furnished room. Presently his companion withdrew his hands, and lying back in his chair, regarded him curiously.

"In this hidden exotic room," he said, "at the top of a deserted house, you have the portrait-parable of my life. There is not much to tell in the way of facts and dates, for I have spent my years in drifting aimlessly through a tanglement of moods. I was born into a rich household, among people whose great ambition was to do things in the world. For them *to do things* meant the gaining of social recognition and the holding of offices. My ancestors had set me an example in this direction, for they had all been soldiers and statesmen—men of energy. Their lives and ideals were external. To me the most actual things, and those of greatest worth, have ever been the visions and moods, and exquisite elations of the secret heart, which no man can appraise nor money buy. I am

the last of my worn-out race; in my dreamy temperament I represent an under-energized revolt against the materialistic, garish projects of our modern age. It would seem that the dynamic ecstasies of the soul, which three generations of my kinsfolk had cowed and crushed under in themselves, gathering power in captivity, erupted at last and found expression in myself.

“Perhaps that is the process by which most poets are created; they are furious reassertions of the embryo God who was strangled in their fathers’ lives; they are songs made articulate through exile, which return with chanting from Babylon. From the outset my parents’ hopes for me were of their own making. Living under the same roof with them, meeting them continually at all the habitual rendezvous of family life, I dwelt apart in spirit, and was solitary. Very early in my career I discovered that between them and me there was a great gulf fixed, across which no one of us could pass. As a child, when in my presence they discussed my future, I kept silent. They mistook my silence for acquiescence. It was nothing of the sort, for in secret I rebelled. When I spoke with you the other night, I said that my great error had been cowardice—that I had been afraid of life. It was this cowardice that made me keep silent. I allowed my people to train me up for a career of outward parade because I dreaded to undeceive them. In proportion as this world went wrong with me, I withdrew yet more distantly into my unreal land—more real to me.

“So, when my education was over, I was sent out *to do things*; but I was born *to dream things*. Being set to a task for which I was by nature unfitted, I calamitously failed. The family honour felt itself tarnished, and I was disgraced. If a man is too unbrave to make a necessary crisis for himself, sooner or later that very crisis which he has been striving to avoid will be forced upon him from the

outside. I had been unbrave. I, for no noble purpose, had subjected my outward life to the ruling of others when I ought to have been so living as to make each moment a progressive step in the fulfilment of my highest soul. Now that I had failed, no one cared what I did with myself. I was set free to realize myself in whatsoever way I willed.

“Well, as you know, there are commonly supposed to be two potential ways in which a man may fulfil his soul in art—the one by riotously expending his health, purity, and ideals, and then regretting their loss; the other, by regarding himself with humble reverence as a thing most sacred, as the mouth of deity, speaking to living men of God. The first method is the easier; so I chose it. Cowardice again!

“The larger portion of my life had been spent in this inner world of my own creating. In it I had sought refuge from the brutal reality of facts. You will notice I always discovered my consolations in flight. Midmost in my hidden land there lived that woman of whom I made mention to you last night. She had lived there always, since I was a child. I cannot remember the day when I did not know and love her. With her are bound up all my earliest memories. I think she only began to exist when I began.

“So, now that I was master of my own career, I determined to devote all my energies to the luring of my ghost-lover out from among the shadows into created life. I felt that, soon or late, she must be in the world. I set out in search of her. I travelled through many lands, both east and west, watching for her face. I knew that some day, almost by chance, I should turn a bend in the road and find her waiting there.

“At first I kept myself pure for that day, that I might be worthy of her. But as the years went by, and my search proved vain, in sheer despair I hurled myself

into vanities and the round of riots which men call pleasures. I said, 'I will forget her face.' But in the midmost frenzy of debauch I would dream and see her eyes, and feel myself constrained to set out, sullied with lust and tortured with remorse, in quest of her again.

"In ten years of seeking I found no trace of her. I had begun to grow old. I had accomplished no useful purpose; for I postponed all plans of action till I should have lured her into the world of flesh and joined her to myself. So the years went by.

"One evening, towards sunset, I was travelling on foot through the Carnic Alps, coming down into the Friuli, when, rounding the shoulder of a mountain, I saw spread below me the landscape of my imaginary world. I stood still, uttering a choking cry. There could be no mistake; it *was* my land. There, through the tangled garden of the plain, ran the little river of which I had dreamt; there was gathered the village, with its red church tower thrust up against the sky, and the tall poplars with their hooded heads and semblance of folded hands, and beyond all, in a distant cleft of the hills, the old grey castle, where I knew that my lady led her days. All sounds of that country were familiar to me as they drifted up through the cool, still air. I recognized the vesper-chimes and the pause in the lowing of the kine. The very shapes of the clouds and the country's fragrance were known utterly.

"When I came to the village it was night. I felt like a man who, long years since, had gone forth into the world, and, returning to the homeland, had suddenly recaptured his past. I crouched beneath the walls of the village street, listening to the peasants' dialect and watching their lean, long shadows where they passed. Everything that I saw and heard was like the retelling of an oft-repeated tale. Very frequently I would halt,

recalling the scene, and would say, 'Yes, and I met her here, and here, and she said this thing to me.'

"Confident that I would see her, though the night was now advanced, I set out for the castle on the hill. As I travelled I planned within myself how I would fulfil the glorious promise of my life—now that she was found; how I would sing for men those songs which they ought to hear; how I would prove to the world that I had not misspent my days.

"The castle was in darkness. The tall trees which stood about it looked uncared for and forlorn. A slight wind rustled their branches; a mountain stream, shallow and thirsty, sighed above the pebbles where it ran—these were the only sounds of life. When I approached the gateway, I found that it was crumbled and broken down. When I passed within the walls, I saw that they were deserted. My hope had betrayed me. Here was a new cynicism of the gods—I had been permitted to lure my shadow-world into actual life, but she who had power to make this achievement of worth to me was not there.

"In the ruined castle, stretched upon the grass beneath the open sky, I spent a bitter night. The realization of a portion of my dreams only served to make me more hungry for her. Again to escape my sorrow I resorted to cowardice—to flight. Heretofore I had been afraid of Man—now I was terrified of God. He seemed to me a monster who jeered and tantalized the creatures whom His own hands had wrought. So I crept away and sinned, that I might forget. Because she was withheld from me, I strove to satisfy my thirst with such loves as may be purchased; but always, older and more haggard, month by month, and year by year, I would return to the castle in her search. In the north or south, east or west, midway in some sordid vice, I would hear her voice from the Fruili, calling. In haste I would travel back, sometimes

through thousands of miles, across continents and oceans, to the castle on the hill.

“At last, three years ago, when I had become old and broken, I returned and found her there. She was young, as I had seen her in my visions—a mere slim girl. When I looked upon her white maidenhood and contrasted it with my sere old age, then I knew that for me she had come too late. Had I kept myself pure for her sake, and been more faithful to my soul, God would have sent her earlier, while I still had strength and health. Perhaps I could, by the sheer passionate force of my unwasted love, have willed her into this life the sooner; but now she had come too late. All my life I had been silent for her sake, waiting for her coming, that she might give me utterance. Because I have played the coward and given rein to my baser self, I must go down unuttered to the grave. She is my creation. I dreamed her into this actual world, and now I am not worthy of the thing which I have made. Though she should will to accept me now, I dare not go to her; she is the memory of my spotless youth, and of all that I have lost. Look at me! Aye, look closely! I am old—old and defiled.”

He rose from his chair, with a tragic gesture, swaying upon his feet. Going to a mirror, he struck a match and held it above his head. “Ah,” he said, pointing derisively at his own reflected image, “you are old; knowledge of evil is written on your face.” Turning to Gabriel, speaking slowly, he said, “And yet I was young once. There was a time when those words which I have spoken to you to-night might have been said to me, with equal truth, ‘Stand still, true poet that you are!’ That day is passed. This room is the parable of my life; the deserted house with its untraversed stairways, which stretch between me and the world of men; this silent chamber beneath the roof, with its hothouse flowers and exotic furnishings; and the

ceiling above, which is of glass, through which I watch the stars—beauty, decay, quietness, and the eternal. This boy, who is so beautiful and silent, is also a symbol. He comes from the village where she was. He is silent only because he cannot speak, for he was born dumb and deaf. So you see I have had the courage at last to own myself defeated; which courage is, perhaps, only another sort of flight. However, it is my one brave act.”

But Gabriel was otherwise impressed. What though the man’s pursuit of his ideal had been straggling, his patience and faith in waiting through the interminable years for the coming of a woman, of whom he had only dreamt, was magnificent. That, when at length she came, he was sullied and not all worthy, was the error of the long delay. That she should then reject him seemed monstrous. He pictured her as a vampire, lovely only in external form, who visits men while they sleep and robs them of their life.

So, speaking passionately, he asked, “And did she not love you when you had found her?”

And when the Poet shook his head, he cried, “Then she is cruel and untrue at heart, however fair she may be in face. For her sake you have wasted all your years, and now you are slowly dying of her love.”

“In that I am no exception,” said the Poet. “Remember John Keats. We must all give life in exchange for love.”

But Gabriel was unconvinced. “If you have failed,” he said, “it is not yours but the woman’s fault; by adding her life to yours she could at one stroke make your failures successes and your life complete.”

The Poet broke in upon his words, “No, no,” he cried. “I am my own creation. My follies are my own. I should not only have loved, but have followed the highest when I had seen it, without halting or turning aside. I

did not sufficiently reverence either my vision or myself. She is not to blame. Her refusal of me is that same physical denial which my uncontaminated youth has given to this crippled, misused body which I now possess."

When Gabriel shook his head gloomily, unwilling to be persuaded, "I can prove it to you," the Poet said. He lit a lamp, and beckoning Gabriel to follow, crossed the room. Lifting aside the arras, he disclosed a door, which he proceeded to unlock. The room which they entered was of small dimensions and bare of furnishings, save for the full-length portrait of a woman which hung upon the wall farthest from the door. As they passed over towards it the Poet carried his light low along the floor; Gabriel noticed how everywhere dust lay thick upon the boards, save for the narrow track which led to and from the picture. When they had come to where it was hanging the Poet turned and said, "Now you will see that what I have said of her is true, and that she has chosen well."

He lifted up his lamp. The sudden falling of the rays athwart the canvas created the illusion of a living face, which sprang out towards them from the darkness. Gabriel stepped back with a cry, thrusting out his hands as if to keep something off. The portrait was that of a young girl standing upon an Italian hillside, gazing quietly down into some distant, faintly suggested vista of meadow and woodland valley. He recognized her face. As he looked more intently he could not doubt that the original of this portrait had been Helen Thurm.

"Ah, you may well cry out," his companion was saying. "Is she not lovely? Here is the face which has haunted me through life. There has been much of pleasure in the pain which I have borne. Did I not speak truly to you in that which I said of her?"

When there was no answer to his questions he turned

about resentfully, but discovered the startled look which was in Gabriel's eyes.

"You know her," he whispered. When he had glanced at him again, he said, "I believe you also love her."

And Gabriel confessed that this was so. Then the Poet extinguished his lamp, and leading the way into the outer room, relocked the door.

Facing Gabriel abruptly, almost fiercely, he said, "One poet has already failed the world, you must not also fail. I am not jealous of you because of that which you have told me. I am glad. Now I know why I was drawn towards you last night; you, a poet as yet unrecognized, loving this same woman, are the reincarnation of my passionate, unspent youth, entering into life for a second trial. Those tasks which I have omitted, you will accomplish."

Then he questioned Gabriel concerning his prospects and where he lived. When Gabriel mentioned the Turnpike he grew pale.

"You must not remain there," he cried excitedly; "it was the Turnpike that killed poor Chatterton; he lived there to within three months of his death. Why, he may have suffered in the same house and the very room that you now occupy. 'To die in the Turnpike' was synonymous in the writings of Dryden's time with dying like a profligate, and having hags to shroud one's corpse and to close one's eyes. It has always been a place where the desperate go to die. It was there that a king's mistress perished in her old age of hunger, and nakedness, and thirst—

'Within a ditch of loathsome scent
Which carrion dogs did much frequent.'

There is a menace in the very name. If you would keep yourself white, and otherwise you may not succeed as a

poet, you must live in the country. When Man sinned himself out of Eden, he entered into cities where God is not. If you would keep your soul immaculate you must live in the open world, which was made by God, and which God still makes."

When Gabriel pleaded poverty the Poet smiled sadly. "Though you are my former self come back to life, you must not repeat my history," he said. "I made excuses; that was how I failed. With me it was consideration for my parents which kept me from being brave; with you it is lack of funds. Both pleas are equally mean and futile as justifications for thwarting the splendid purposes of God. How modern an argument is that of yours, 'That you can only afford to live in a town'! In any case, if you will allow me, I think I can make this possible. You need not disrelish anything that I may do for you as done by a stranger. We are the same, sharing a common experience and a common quest. Helping you is now my sole remaining way of realizing my own genius—through yours. You must not disappoint me. I am an old man, and have not long to live."

So Gabriel promised that he would accept his help.

The room had grown darker, for the fire had burned low and its logs were ashy and charred. For some minutes they sat in silence. Gabriel gazed through the roof of glass to where the stars unhurriedly sailed. How quietly they went about their tasks! They seemed to rebuke his over-haste and frenzy to grow famous. Clouds drove up in fury and shut them out from sight; but, when clouds were passed or dispersed in rain, the stars were still there, no whit less calm. They were constant; the clouds were fleeting; that was the secret of their quiet. Thus far he had led a cloud's life, now he must lead a star's. After all, if he were to sum it up in one phrase, the confession which he had just listened to was one, not so much of

positive wrong as of omitted right—the omission of a righteous self-poise. He vowed that he would cultivate this sailing quality of being steady in every storm. He looked to where the Poet sat, and noticed through the shadows how he seemed to have sunk forward in his chair, with his arm hanging limp across the side. He jumped up in alarm and bent above him. “Do you feel ill? Is there anything the matter?” he asked.

“No, no; I am well enough,” the Poet answered, rousing himself with an effort.

Then, coming to himself, he stood up. “I must apologize to you,” he said. “I had almost forgotten your presence in my effort to escape my own. I was endeavouring to avoid the thought that I once possessed all the promise which now is yours. It is not courteous in me to say this, but you will understand. You had better go now. I will write you to-morrow concerning our plans for your future.”

Before he reached the door the Poet had called him back. “I may never see you again,” he said, “for I am not strong in health. If this should be our last good-bye, which I somehow dread, I want you to remember all that I have said, and to be warned by my catastrophe. Believe in yourself. Lay hold of life with your human hands, and have no fear. Beyond all things, keep your youth stainless for the sake of your art, and for the sake of *her*.”

He led him into the midst of the room where the star and moonlight fell. He peered anxiously into Gabriel’s countenance as if to make certain that he had not been deceived in his judgment. Then he bowed his head, and, burying his face in his hands, turned hurriedly away into the dark. “A great poet! A great poet!” he sobbed. “The accusation of myself! And I, even I, was once like that.”

CHAPTER XIII

A HARMONY AND SOME DISCORDS

NIGHT is more charitable than day ; with its beginning those surface imperfections, which teased the eye under the searching gaze of the sun, drift out from sight—only the crude nobilities of the inherent rough design remain. Many things that seemed costly, and fashioned for desire, dwindle and appear of little worth when evening gathers. Night alters values.

As in the shining of the streets and the mystery of the shadows London grew into a new splendour, so to Gabriel's fancy did the crowded thoroughfares of his own life. Dignity and a sense of peace clothed his imaginings ; a lethargic generosity, inclining almost to indifference, made his heart more gentle. Standing beneath the narrow strip of starlit sky revealed between the chimney-tops, the surge of passing traffic in his ears, he questioned whether, after all, such struggles and yearnings as his were not in vain. Again he wondered what would it all amount to in five hundred years ? Who would be the wiser for his labours, or the sadder for his crimes ? One reward awaited every life. Somewhere or other, in village or in city, his body would lie at rest ; whether it had moved famously or infamously, it would be equally forgotten.

The Past is very tender toward life's fragments ; gathering them up, he covers them with the same oblivion, apportioning an equal measure of forgetfulness to all. He

is an unthrifty altruist, who bestows of his mercies without blare of trumpets and undiscerningly. He is the friend of Love in his philanthropies, for his eyes are blind ; but with this difference, that he neither helps nor harms by his last innocent gifts.

This being so, Gabriel questioned, why should he not live inconsequently as do the bulk of mankind, ceasing to fret and fume, enjoy his little day, and, at the appointed hour, slip out from sight ? Of one thing alone could he be sure, that he would inevitably die.

Then, through his cowardice came back to him accusingly the eager words of the Poet, and the pledge which he had exchanged with Lancaster in the forest, to be above all else, good. “If I cannot be good,” he cried with determination, “I can at least refrain from evil. I will refuse to cause pain knowingly. I will be wise according to my capacity ; and, beyond all else, gentle—the world shall not be unhappier for me.”

Charmed and flattered as he had been by the sudden acclamation of the Poet, he had been also depressed by it. Was not this the old story of men who fight to lose the battle ? Had not this recognition of his possible greatness, rendered by one who had already failed, been typical of life, and come too late ?

Phrase after phrase of the Poet’s impassioned utterance had fallen like burning coals upon his conscience and still scorched holes in his memory. “Keep yourself white—it is the only way to succeed as a poet.” “Keep your youth stainless for the sake of your art, and for the sake of *her*.” “Because I gave rein to my baser self I must go down unuttered to the grave.” And he had listened in silence to these assumptions that his own record was blameless, whereas he knew that it was most grievously sullied. After all, the turpitude of any sin does not consist in the single act itself, but in its relation to all the prior acts of

life ; the proper test of its evil should be not of what has it deprived the world, but of how much has it robbed the criminal. To kiss a woman mistakenly on a dark night seems little or nothing as a single act ; to do so in the house of a friend, who was placed in Lancaster's situation, meant much. It meant the betrayal of loyalty, and Gabriel knew that he was soiled. The most terrible consequence of sin in oneself is that, sooner or later, it reads its way into the actions of others and, mirror-wise, makes known its native ugliness. To the jaundiced eye life becomes conspiracy, everything unclean, from the ignoblest to the highest, nothing escapes the taint ; the eye is fixed upon the mirror, and the mirror reflects the eye. Gabriel, remembering this, thought that he could now explain his failure that day to see the world as white—he had seen reflected everywhere the disloyalty of himself.

Yet he had not had the heart to undeceive the Poet ; moreover, he knew that to most men such scruples would sound childish. Now that he was by himself, and could think things over, he felt inclined to refuse his proffered help ; the offer had been made to a blameless man, which he was not. To accept would be to lie. Besides, if one act of hypocrisy had had power to poison the world for him that day, might it not poison his whole life ? Every thought and act of the idealist carries him nearer, or farther away from, his ideal's consummation. Some acts and thoughts may be so divisive as to place the thing desired quite out of sight. Gabriel fearfully wondered whether his was such an act. The gift of a poet is so elusive and so little under his control, deserting him causelessly for months together and returning tyrannically at inopportune times, that there is always room in its owner's mind for terror lest it has really departed forever this time. Gabriel smiled bitterly at the fancy. This would indeed be a fine conclusion to the prophecy of that day.

Ruminating and arguing thus, he came by chance to the Queen's Hall, where the Fifth Symphony was to be performed that night.

People were flocking in in droves; he was none too early. Choosing the Promenade, as being best suited for viewing the house, he entered.

The orchestra was assembled, and the preliminary tunings in progress. Having nothing better to do, he studied the faces of the musicians. Young men and old were there; some mere boys, others wrinkled by poverty and age.

He noted their foibles and mannerisms, those little treasured distinctions of personality which bolster up defeat, and enable even the faint-hearted to seem brave. The distinguished gesture of one in combing his fingers through his hair, the delicacy with which another poised his violin. The small and inexpensive fopperies of dress. The frequent display of long, lithe fingers. The unnecessary fussiness over the arrangement of scores. All the irritating personal attentions of star performers were here reproduced by men who had, for the most part, already failed. Conceit is universally condemned as a vice; a mean vice, moreover, and one which calls forth only disgust in the beholder. Very often it is a most courageous virtue, as Hilda had once said.

As Gabriel gazed upon this tumult of marionettes, jerked this way and that by their sham, external pride, he recalled her words, and there rose up before him visions of lonely garrets. Instead of repulsion he was filled with pity.

There, upon one canvas, was the game of living writ large; its players, men of all ages, nationalities, and classes of society; a game of hazard at which sat desperate idealists, each holding a card, one or two of which at most could win. Many had lost already, but, with the violent

intoxication of the gamester, had returned to the table to witness another throw. A game at which men grow old, and whose greatest prizes go invariably to the young and inexperienced; at which, notwithstanding, all ages play.

The conductor entered, bowed, tapped with his baton, and the dumb strings sighed into sound. The weariness in the musicians' faces, which had at first impressed Gabriel as dejection and bafflement, suddenly vanished; light leapt into their eyes; the exhaustion of their limbs changed into a rhythmic animation; affectations and coquetries departed; the soul of the music surged and throbbed through each separate nerve, and combined in one melodious compelling voice. This plaintive ecstasy of harmony was the real expression of these men's lives; an hour without the instrument was for them misspent, and of no account. To call forth exquisite singing was in itself for them to achieve; to be silent, to fail.

The artist within him awoke and was glad. What was material happiness or unhappiness, gain or loss, compared with this—the joy of creating beautiful sensations whether of sound or sight? Of how little real worth was the approval of others when contrasted with the momentary satisfaction of approving oneself? The wise, sweet words of Galilee rang in his ears, with a novel intention: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And how greatly was a man profited who lost the whole world that he might attain his soul?

Attain his soul! That was what he had been doing. For the past three months that little poverty-stricken world, which he had prized so highly, had been gradually slipping out of his possession; here was the explanation, it was the necessary ordeal which preceded the possession of a soul.

These men, who were torturing and enthralling him

with their tremendous catastrophe of sound, had trodden the same path. It would be well worth his while to live long years of agony if, at the end, he might produce one such perfection of singing, if only for a single night.

He looked round upon this impassive English audience to see if there was no one who was aware of the pain which had gone to the making of this pleasure. In so doing he caught sight of three faces which he knew. Almost immediately above him sat Helen, Rupert, and his father. They had already seen him, and were smiling down in recognition. Everything had seemed so unreal of late that he could hardly believe his eyes. Was not this rather some pageant of sleep, from which he would awake to find the sun shining in upon the old accustomed prints and flowered wall-paper, and arise to take up anew the familiar round of work and recreation, wondering what phantoms of form and voice had fashioned for him the substance of his night? Still they looked down on him and smiled, till he, doubting the actuality of their presence, waved his hand and smiled back.

The chords of the Fifth Symphony rose up, and swayed, and fell away in sobbing, like waves on a seashore.

As he listened, the old story of how the miracle was wrought out returned. Of how no one had understood the meaning of that composition until one questioned Beethoven, and he replied, "Thus Fate knocks at the door of a man's soul."

We are all egotists at heart. How should we be otherwise in a world where nothing is certain save ourselves? To what else can we refer our emotions unless it be to the sounding-board of self? How shall we measure the men and women whom we perceive, and the figments which we apprehend, except by the standard of ourselves?—the only realities which we can ever hope to understand, and even then but faintly.

If a pleasure so subjective as music is to be fittingly enjoyed it must be selfishly, with sole reference to oneself.

So with Gabriel this night, every tone and semitone had a direct bearing upon his exclusive experience : as though it had been written for him and for him alone.

Fate! Fate! He had mocked at Fate, jeered at it as a vulgar dread; and yet how plausible it seemed, nay, how necessary while the rise and fall of those momentous wailings were in his ears.

He could visualize the whole tragedy. A lonely horseman riding over a deserted moorland. The sudden appearance upon the dull horizon of a second in pursuit. The terrified tightening of the rein; the mad hurry of flight; the clattering hoofs of the pursuer; the haggard face of the pursued, looking back, bent low over the horse's mane; a voice, pleading with tremulous apprehension, on the far-blown cry of the wind. The space ever narrowing; the arrival at refuge; the fast-locked door; the thankful prayer for safety. Then again, the horror of immediate death; the tapping at the door; the threats; the arguings; the parleyings for peace; and again the tapping. At the end, the hurried havoc; the crash of splintered wood; the last pathetic complaint; and the silence.

"Thus Fate knocks at the door of a man's soul." How true it was! We mock at Fate as a fallacy, deride it as a superstition; and yet it is always there, dogging our steps, and forever gaining on us.

He, for one, would cease to try to understand life, and, for that matter, to blame his fellow-men. "I will take things as they come bravely, and will strive to be charitable and to do my best," he said.

The concert was at an end. A mist had gathered before his eyes, through which he could dimly discern

those three faces smiling down upon him, and the beckoning of hands.

He shook his head in negation, and took his departure.

Outside the wind blew cold, restoring him to himself.

Sleep was out of the question ; he could not sleep. The wings of a great calm rested over him, making him neither sad nor happy ; and the melancholy of music was in his ears.

“Gabriel, how you have made me hurry ! Since you would not come to me, I have had to come to you. Are you not glad ?”

Helen stood beside him, looking a little shy, but very adorable. She wore a long, grey robe of fur, flung loosely over her shoulders, exposing the throat, and falling away till it trailed in the snow at her feet. She was gowned in a low-cut dress of silver shade, and carried in her breast a full-blown rose of red. Her hair was looped along the neck in old Greek goddess style, and was gathered from off her forehead, breaking away, where it reached the temples, into a profusion of ripples and curls, in which tiny flakes of snow had lodged and glistened.

There she stood at his side, smiling timidly—a child found trespassing and fearful of results. The vision of her beauty was so unexpected that Gabriel was struck speechless in admiration and wonderment. His deity had forsaken Parnassus, and the girl of the silent Thames looked out from her eyes.

“I oughtn’t to have done it,” she continued, in explanation. “I suppose it is very indiscreet of me ; but then you looked so miserable at the beginning of the evening that I couldn’t help it.”

Men are the clumsiest of creatures in their relations with one another, but, when they come to deal with the women whom they love, through sheer excess of emotion they are often rougher than brute beasts.

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“But—but, where are Rupert and my father?” he stammered.

She seemed not at all to notice his lack of taste in her anxiety to justify her action. “I left them in order that I might follow after you. They’ve gone together to the club. Rupert and I do pretty much as we like, you know; we don’t criticize one another very often; and there’s no one else to mind. I don’t think your father liked my running off, though,” and here she caught her breath and laughed, “but I was too quick for him to stop me.”

Still Gabriel said nothing.

“If you don’t want me, Gabriel, I can go,” she whispered.

“But I do want you, Helen. I want you more than ever I did, only—I don’t want to do anything that might be unkind to you. You know what I mean, compromise you in the eyes of others.”

“You needn’t be afraid of that,” she replied, with a toss of the head; “you can never behave half so barbarously to me as I have to myself. I’m always doing things which people don’t approve. I don’t trouble about the regard of others; my great anxiety is to regard myself.”

“Well, dear, in any case you mustn’t stand here much longer, or you’ll be catching cold.”

He called a hansom, and, not knowing where to drive, told the man to go anywhere he pleased.

The cabman, thinking to show his discretion, and so earn an extra tip, chose out the Park, now white, and silent, and shadowy. All its roadways were deserted; it wore an air of remoteness, which the throbbing circle of the London lights only served to exaggerate. It seemed a dream-garden, planted on an island in the midmost turbulence of life. Across the stream was the world of standards and proprieties, but where he was all things

were governless and vague. For some few minutes he said nothing; he feared to shatter the enchantment, and was content to watch her face. How untroubled it was, and how strong in courage! As it had been a soul made captive in the silent brain of a body long years dead, he recalled the portrait he had so lately seen in the secret room of the Poet's shuttered house. In the three years which had elapsed since it was painted, her expression had not changed; she conveyed the impression of a being shadowy and unattainable, rather than that of a created woman; she seemed, as indeed the Poet had claimed, a grand idea which had been urged by human worship to materialize into the substantial world. With her very excellence, she had broken the heart of the man who had lured her into life. Would she prove more accessible to himself? Would his own love of her be more successful than that other man's? Or would she, who was by nature so uncruel, be also the cause of his disaster? He remembered the agonized words of Jehane, when she discovered that she had been ordained, beyond her power of choice, to bring sorrow upon the man she loved—

“Lord Jesus, pity your poor maid!
For in such wise they hem me in,
I cannot choose but sin and sin,
Whatever happens.”

Had some such shadow of fate followed this woman also out from the great darkness, when she entered through the Gates of Life? Was she destined to allure and slay men with her goodness, just as vile women did with their crimes? And all the while that these thoughts were passing through his brain, she sat there beside him, silent and inscrutable, a ghost woman in a living world, with the whiteness of the untrodden snow as background to her profile.

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At length he said, "I met a friend of yours last night, and have been with him to-day."

"I know his name," she answered. "I saw upon your face to-night, when you suddenly caught sight of me, that same look which his once had. It frightened me; that was why I came to you."

"What kind of look?" he asked.

She pressed her lips tightly together and would not answer him.

"Who was he?" she asked, leaning forward eagerly, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands.

"I did not ask his name, nor did he offer to tell me. But he told me who I was; he said that I was his former self, sent back by God for a second trial, to accomplish the work which he had not done. He is a poet who should have become great, only——"

"I know, I know," she broke in. "But what had he got to say to you, and how did you discover that he was my friend?"

Then Gabriel told her of the Poet's house and of how the Poet had acclaimed him, and of how he had told him of his own life in order that he might save him from the same failure and the same mistakes.

Her face became very tender while he spoke, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"'He saved others,'" she said, "'Himself He cannot save.' How bitterly true that is of all of us! I wish it might have been true of me in his particular case. But, tell me, did he mention me to you by name?"

"No; but he showed me a portrait, hung in an empty room, which I recognized."

"Gabriel," she said, looking him searchingly between the eyes, "I wonder what you thought of me when you first learnt this. You must have thought me hard and cruel. Ah, I can see you did. I believe you are even now

afraid of me, for your own sake. Yet there are excuses which I could make. I was very young at the time, and did not understand him. That which he told me sounded so preposterous. Vehement passion in one whom we do not love seems always ridiculous. He looked so old—I fear I was not kind. When at last I realized what his confession had meant to him and sought him out, I found that I had driven him to vices from which there was no return. Moreover, he was proud, and would not let me do for him out of compassion that which I might have done for love. I destroyed him with my pity as truly as if I had struck him with a knife.”

“He does not think so, Helen. When I, not knowing who you were, accused you, he said emphatically that you were not to blame, and showed me your portrait as proof.”

“Ah, but when you first caught sight of me to-night, you had his look—you were afraid. I do not reproach you with it ; one poet has been ruined through his love of me, and, I agree with you, that one is enough.”

“My fear arose from another cause,” he said. “I have done something which has made me unworthy of you ; therefore I was afraid. My talk with your friend made me realize how much I have lost.”

She tried to turn him aside with a forced gaiety.

“Do you know, Gabriel,” she said, “you men are so amusing when you get to speaking of your peccadilloes. You place us women on such lofty mountain heights, and never for a moment remember that, by our very elevation, we are enabled to see all the farther. Rupert, being a brother, does just the opposite, sets me down upon the plain and thinks that I can see everything. I don’t think I want to hear your confession ; it would seem as though you doubted my faith in you.”

“My sins against you have been two, the second and the worst was a sin of the mind.”

“I don’t think I should trouble much about sins of the mind, if I were you; even the best of us commit them every day. To control one’s hands, and lips, and feet, that is comparatively easy; to master one’s thoughts—well, I suppose we ought to try, but I should never blame any one who failed, because I am so rarely successful.”

“But that is to me the most terrible side of the sin, Helen, that we hardly consider thought as a sin; and yet, it is the beginning of every wickedness. To think hard and cruel things about friends in cold blood is far worse than to carry them out in hasty action.”

“You really are very perverse, Gabriel. If all that you say is correct, I must be very bad. But why need you talk of this just now? If, however, you have set your mind on telling me, I suppose it is best to let you get it over quickly. But, remember, I’m not going to believe any of your morbid libels against yourself.”

“Sit forward a little, Helen, so that I may see your face where the light falls; and please look straight ahead, it will be easier for me so. That’s right.”

Very slowly and hesitatingly, jerking out his sentences, he began, searching diligently for the kindest words, and with his eyes fixed on her—

“I did John Lancaster an injury some short time ago with reference to a woman he loves, but do not know even now whether he has become aware of it. I did this while I was stopping under his roof, and sharing his hospitality, and he is the best man-friend that I have. I suffered agonies lest he should discover, or had discovered, what I had done. I would willingly have told him myself, but was compelled to keep silent for the woman’s sake. Don’t misunderstand me, the fault was all mine; she was not to blame. My own sin led me to suspect the world; I could see in it only bitterness and folly. That was my second crime. So, when the Poet told me of the woman who had

rejected him, I thought her harsh and cruel. I said with a sneer, 'She is typical of all women, and of life itself.' Even when I had discovered the woman's name, ashamed though I am to own it, I did not altogether change my mind. I said, 'If the sufferings of his affection could not outweigh his sinnings, because of her great purity, how shall mine?' I no longer accused you, I thought that absence of temptation had made you austere; I accused my own weakness which would force you to be unkind. Therefore, when I saw you to-night, I was afraid lest I, with my own hands, had built up a barrier, as did the Poet, which could not be torn down. Even after you came to me, while we have been sitting here together, I have——"

She drew back into the shadow sharply, so that he might not see the expression of her face.

"You understand, those were my two crimes?"

She did not answer at once; when she did, she spoke quietly.

"Dear Gabriel, I made a mistake in allowing you to confess. Such words as you have spoken make a woman ashamed of the virtues which are her perquisites. There is something horribly selfish about a feminine chastity which simply humiliates, and does not make men strong. Purity is no longer pure, I think, when it thrusts men and women apart. And who of us all is so clean in spirit that we are qualified to condemn? Why, if we confessed to our friends our most hidden faults, the world would be filled with our enemies. No, there are occasions when silence is a virtue; this was one of them. I want you to do justice to yourself by making me one promise. Will you?"

"There is no promise which I would not make to you."

"I want you to pledge me your honour that you will say no word of this to Mr. Lancaster."

"I promise," he said.

Seizing her hands with a sudden outburst of penitence, he cried—

"But, Helen, say to me that this has made no difference to our love. I understand now, and despise myself. I only told you this because I felt that I must be honest—so that no suspicion, even unuttered, might rest between us. Perhaps it was cowardly in me to have said it, but I felt that until you knew all I could not begin to do well. To-day is a turning-point in my life; I could not set out upon the new road without you. That last night by the Thames made us one for ever."

"Gabriel," she said, her voice trembling, "you must never mention that night again—it is past. If you should really love me at some future time, we shall have to begin all over again. Then it may be right for us to remember, but now it is only just to you that we should forget."

"Ah, but tell me that you are not changed."

She answered evasively, with a fine pretence at merriment—

"Why, you poor boy, how absurd you are to ask such questions! How should I know? Of course I am changed. How can two people go on living and yet remain the same? We are changing all the day. From the moment we live, we commence to die. Change is our great excitement—without it life would grow tiresome."

"That is all too true," he answered her; "but does love change?"

"You and I are now testing that. We shall be able to answer your question better a year from now."

Now that the climax had been reached they relapsed into silence. As they approached the Marble Arch a clock was striking twelve; they decided that it was time to get homeward bound. Out from the snow-steeped Park they passed into the garish lamp-lit world. It looked

horribly real to Gabriel. Marching boldly between the shadows, staring ravenously from side to side, was the army of the *undergone*. Instinctively, that he might shield Helen from this sordid sight, he leant far forward in the hansom, resting his arms above the doors. It was only the old tragedy that he saw, of women's bodies which are exchanged and bought, secretly, at dead of night. It was familiar—he had seen it often; but Helen, sitting beside him, afforded him a contrast which made it seem more unbearably poignant than before. He watched these women's faces as they passed and passed; discerned their sad lips, pale beneath the scarlet rouge; saw beyond the brave falsehood of pleasure that was in their eyes. He scrutinized the men, and heard them defiantly proclaiming, as with one voice, those words which he had heard once already that day, "Because she was withheld from me I strove to satisfy my thirst with such love as may be purchased."

Then something terrible broke loose within him, inundating the secret places of his soul; somewhere within his brain the reservoir of emotional pity had burst. Without moving, he watched and watched, and the tears ran down his face and fell upon his hands. He was too unconscious of himself to be foolishly ashamed, man though he was. Helen stirred upon the seat beside him, and bent forward. "What is it, Gabriel?" she asked gently, when she had seen his face, thinking, no doubt, that she had caused his pain. He pointed with his hands on either side toward the pavements as they flashed murkily by. "Look at them," he sobbed; "they were once happy and now they are lost!—lost!"

"Gabriel," she said earnestly, resting her hand upon his arm, "you will do no good unless it is done for them. Listen! I do not think that what the Poet told you was all fancy; I believe that you are his very self come back into

life. God has given him in you a second chance. I recognized all this when first I met you. That was why I avoided you, and that is why I still refuse to let you love me ; because you are like to him, and I was the unwilling ruin of his life. I want you to go away from me, and to do your work ; you must save the world. For the present you must forget me, if you are to accomplish this. Should you ever come back, you will find me waiting. I shall wait in vain, I fear, as he has waited for me. But what of that, if you can only contrive to save the world ? ”

He would have answered her, but she silenced him with her hand. “ You are not impure,” she said ; “ it is your purity which has made you imagine all that. But keep yourself stainless for the sake of your work, and be kind to such men and women as these, whoever and wherever they are.”

“ Oh, Helen, it is hard to leave you,” he said. “ What will you do when I am gone ? ”

Before she could answer him, the horse drew up with a jerk at her door. He helped her to alight, thrilling at the contact of her hands and the touch of her dress as she went by him. When the door had been opened, she held out her hand and drew him gently towards her, saying, “ I wish you to understand that I will forget the confession which you have made to me to-night. I want you, when you are gone from me, to become more happy, and this you can best do by keeping brave and good.”

Without another word of parting she left him. As he halted upon the steps, listening attentively that he might catch the last sound of her feet ascending the stairs, he saw a man creep past in the shadow, who turned his head once or twice and watched the house. He descended the steps and hurried after him, curious to discover who he was. Coming level with him beneath a street-lamp, he recognized his friend, the Poet. He was walking slowly,

unsteady in his tread, his eyes glazed, his face shining and raised toward the stars. Gabriel bent above him, and whispered as he passed, "Have you found her yet?"

Mechanically, as in a dream, without recognition or shifting of his eyes, he replied, "I shall find her, sometime—somewhere."

When, late that night, he entered the Turnpike and drew toward Lancaster's house, as he glanced at the weather-beaten sign which hung above the shop, he recognized, as on a former occasion, the eyes of Helen gazing out upon him from the Weeping Woman's eyes. This time he was not startled.

CHAPTER XIV

BOUND FOR THE FOREST OF LEAVES

GABRIEL'S waking thoughts on the morning following were of a mixed character ; so much so that they seemed to him to necessitate immediate attention. The wild gallop of the past twenty-four hours from pinnacle to pinnacle of emotion had left him confused, with the blurred impressions of a man recovering from illness. He speedily made up his mind to set aside the ordinary routine until the forenoon, in order that he might reason out his position. Having locked the door, he refused to go down to breakfast, kindled his pipe, and sat down to disentangle the skein.

He was a man capable of applying a searching scrutiny to his perfections and faults as just and impartial as that of any outsider. Herein lay at once his strength and his great weakness, for while it provided him with the safest of all weapons—self-knowledge, it inclined him to dally with the debilitating luxury of excessive introspection, and made him the sport of his moods.

In reviewing his recent petulances and temptations, he was thoroughly aware of his maltreatment of Lancaster, and the folly of his attitude towards Hilda. After several hours of reflection he took up his pen and wrote out the final verdict which he passed upon himself. This had been a secret habit of his from earliest boyhood : the keeping of a private log of his soul ; the drafting of charts of his

previous conduct for his future benefit. After recording the sequence of events which had led up to his present situation, he wrote, "So far I have only been angry with men for their wrong-doing; that is useless, unless I can learn to tell them how they may do right. I must do more than merely accuse the world. What to tell them I scarcely know as yet; I suspect that I shall discover this most readily by doing right myself. Before I can be great for others, I must be great within myself. Therefore, the worst thing that I can do is to think badly of myself, since that will draw down my attention upon my baser self. I must leave the Weeping Woman as quickly as I can for the sake of John and Hilda; so long as I stay here the memory of my sin stands between me and them. I must also do my best to forget Helen for the present; so long as I remember her, I shall thwart her purpose for me by remaining sad. For this there is a stronger reason: that I have brought nothing but sorrow into her life, am not worthy of her, and ought to leave her free that she also may forget. I must vanish from her world—must go away without seeing her and without letting her know to where I am gone. When I have grown to be her equal, I may remember and return; but not till then. I must blot out the three past months from my memory and devote myself to bringing joy into the world—look out of my window instead of in. This may not be so good for my art, but it will be much better for my soul."

Having thus confessed himself to himself he arose, intending to go out. As he passed through the shop, a note was handed him. Turning it over he found that it bore no stamp. "How did this come?" he asked. He was told that it had been left. It bore neither signature nor address, and was written in a delicate pointed hand. It read as follows—

"A cottage has been placed at your disposal in the

West country, in the Whither Valley, in the heart of the Forest of Leaves ; on the back of this page you will find the address. You can stop there so long as it suits your purpose. It is already furnished, and will be prepared to receive you within three days. If you require money, you will find that an account has been opened in your name at the Monbridge County Bank. There is a piece of advice which you ought to have, which is this : get into your own mind, explore yourself, and write down nothing which is not a part of your own sincerest self. When you have finished, send your manuscript to the below-mentioned publisher's address ; he will accept it. Remember to write slowly ; do everything thoroughly ; bleed your own experience into that which you write ; let it be your very self."

All that day these words kept ringing in his ears, "Let it be your very self." He did not doubt that the Poet was his benefactor ; but, because the letter was unsigned, he did not attempt to see him that he might thank him. At first he scrupled to accept of his kindness ; then he remembered Chatterton's fate and that ominous warning of what it meant to "die in the Turnpike." The lilt of the old doggerel ballad, which the Poet had quoted to him, ran persistently through his mind—

" Within a ditch of loathsome scent,
Which carrion dogs did much frequent."

He no longer hesitated, but agreed to welcome his good fortune without complaint. With the arrangement for the publication of his book, when it should be completed, he was much elated.

It seemed so strange and impossible that his opportunity should have come to him at last. He had pictured this occasion to himself so often that he doubted even now that he might be dreaming. He went over the events

which had led up to the happy climax one by one, to assure himself that there was really no mistake. Having convinced himself that it was all true, he became possessed of a new fear. Who was he to utter himself in a public manner? It seemed such impudence to suppose that any one could be interested in the thoughts of so young a man. And then again, supposing they were, was it right to gratify their curiosity. He, who had been so reserved that he had not allowed his dearest friend to explore every garret of his being, was now willing to permit any one who paid the trifling sum sufficient for the purchase of his book the come-and-go of the entire mansion of his desires. Surely there was something of irreverence about the procedure. To create characters who moved, and spoke, and impelled, was to usurp the functions of deity; at least, it was coming as near as mortal man could to being God, for it meant the manufacture of men. The danger of the responsibility loomed large. Might he not unwittingly raise up a Frankenstein who had power to love, and hate, and kill, and influence; one who would get beyond his control on the day of his birth, and whom neither he nor any other would have strength to delay? Then, as is ever the case, self-interest began to speak. He saw himself famous and admired; placarded in the papers and dubbed great. The wine of ambition captivated his soul. He saw himself already as he had hoped to be, and laughed for joy.

The next few days passed rapidly. There were books to be collected, packing to be done, until at last, on the evening of the third day, his luggage was sent forward.

Lancaster had watched these preparations for departure without a word of argument. To tell the truth, he was one of those conscientious men who think their way through every sentence before they utter it; in this case, knowing

that his opinion was prejudiced in favour of Gabriel's staying, he had feared to advise.

Now that the step seemed irrevocable, everything having been accomplished except the actual going away, Lancaster trusted himself to speak. Gabriel had just returned from saying farewell to the London streets. Now that he had to leave them, they took on a glamour hitherto unknown. All the shops were decorated for Christmas, all the windows surrounded by excited little children ; somehow every one looked pleasant and contented. Time and again that day, as he crossed a crowded bridge, or wandered along some busy thoroughfare, he had caught the glimpse of a happy passing face, so happy that his lips had involuntarily broken into a smile, and the stranger face had smiled back. There was a spirit of good-will in the air. Everybody and everything seemed animated by kindness. Every 'bus-driver was cracking a joke with a passenger, every policeman helping some timid creature across the road ; underneath the rattle and roar of the great metropolis, he fancied he could hear a subdued, sighing of gladness. Why was it ? he asked. What had brought about the change ? Had it begun within himself, or had the world changed ? Yesterday it had all seemed so sad, and now, to-day, there was nothing but gladness. Was it that he was looking without rather than within, or was it just the old, old story of everything seeming better when once it is lost ?

At the Turnpike, on his return, he found the fire crackling, the blinds tight drawn, and the lights unlit. Lancaster met him on his entry, saying, "Now, Gabriel, I've planned to make a night of it, just such a one as we used to have in the good old days. Hilda has gone out to spend the evening, so we shall be alone by our two selves."

Before Gabriel had come to live at the Turnpike, it had been one of his great delights to steal down to Lancaster's, and to spend the evening in a darkened room by the fire-

light, talking intimately of the hopes, and fears, and temptations, and dreams, with which we all set out at the start; but so soon forget, because we grow afraid to mention them.

Lancaster's rooms had possessed at that time a subtle charm for him, a something of mystery.

That here, in the very heart of the busy life, within ear-shot of Bow Bells, and within cry of the coster, there should be found a cloistered haven of books and a sympathetic friend, had appealed to him with all the adventure of the Arabian Nights.

The antiquity of the house, the strange contrast between its inmate and its environment, may have had much to do with this, but the prime factor, after all, was the genuine love of these two men.

They sat down quietly to the meal which was spread before them, the fire-flame flinging long shadows upon the wall, imaginative and reminiscent of other memorable occasions. Lancaster, in the meanwhile, inquired into Gabriel's plans for the future, drawing word pictures of the cottage in the Whither Valley, and encouraging him in his brilliant hopes. When the table had been cleared, they drew up their chairs close together by the fireside, and lit their pipes.

"I shall be sorry to lose you," said Lancaster; "for me, these last months have been the happiest of my life."

"I blame myself," said Gabriel, "because I might have made them so much happier."

"You shall not say that," answered Lancaster, stretching out to him his hand; "there are no degrees in happiness; to have been happy at all, that is the great accomplishment."

"There you speak truly," said Gabriel, looking dreamily into the fire. "I have made the mistake of qualifying all my joys till they have lost their pleasure.

I am going to do it no more. I've come to the conclusion that men find exactly what they look for, and nothing else. If you get accustomed to thinking that the world is bad, you'll soon find that not only the world is bad, but that you yourself are also. It comes to this, that a man casts a shadow which he calls the world; he may complain against or praise it, but he rarely remembers that he has had the making of the shadow, and can alter it—that he is his world."

"You are quaint, Gabriel; you talk like an old man. Why, all the time you've been here you've been delightful. The fact that you have such a giant purpose before you has acted as a goad and a spur to the ambitions of others. It's true you've played the cynic from time to time; but Hilda and I have understood you well enough to know that nothing was meant."

"That is because you threw a shadow," Gabriel responded, "and your shadow was kindness."

Lancaster was silent in thought for some few minutes, and then said, "Yes, Gabriel; I believe that what you say of me is growing to be true. These things take place so quietly that one is unconscious of their presence. The revolution began the first time I met you. You were so young and buoyant, and held such charitable views of everything and everybody in general. You are the man of the tropic heart who has set my heart aflame. I owe all that is best in me to your influence. I was crabbed and reticent, and you were generous and spontaneous. I didn't care a rap for other people and what they suffered, but you seemed to feel their calamities as though they had been your own. You awakened my sleeping affections; the coming of Kate taught me what to do with them."

While Lancaster had been speaking, Gabriel had been wrestling with himself. How could he sit still and listen to all this torrent of undeserved praise without a word

of remonstrance? Yet he had pledged his honour to Helen.

“I want you to listen to me without interruption for just one minute, John,” he said. “I have wronged you both in thought and deed during my stay with you, and I want to hear you say that you forgive me. It has been a torture to me to think about, and I’ve been on the point of telling you many times, but couldn’t.”

Lancaster threw him a look which might have betokened exact knowledge. “Gabriel,” he said, “you know I forgive you. Now don’t let us talk any more about it. These are our last hours together for weeks to come; let us take our pleasure and forget, as we used to do.”

Together, in that hour of quiet, all the old scenes of friendship were rehearsed and the favourite books reviewed—the vague, immutable desires of life repondered, and moments of love and intimacy relived, till Gabriel, his heart growing gentler, cried, “Of what advantage are all our endeavours? What is fame or money when contrasted with friendship? I feel as though I could be happy to be poor and overlooked all my days if there was only one man, such as you are, whom I might know to the uttermost and by whom I might be known.”

Lancaster went to the bookcase, and, taking down a volume, began to read—

“But often, in the world’s most crowded streets,
But often in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life.”

And then—

“Only—but this is rare—
When a belovèd hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another’s eyes read clear,

When our world-deafened ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed—
A bolt is shot back somewhere in the breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze."

"I wonder how many men and women are feeling just that desire now," said Lancaster thoughtfully. "For my part, I have experienced the longing all my life."

"More than we think," replied Gabriel. "Every one, more or less, at some stage in his existence, after great wrong-doing or the loneliness of sorrow. Perhaps the very boy who comes to run your errands, and the woman who comes to do your housework. In the course of a day one must meet with very many people who are perishing for just that touch of the discerning hand."

Lancaster turned aside his head, saying, "Yes; and perhaps Hilda. This was what she meant when she said that nearly all our wretchedness takes its genesis from the craving after ungratified affections, and most of our sins from desperate attempts to steal, borrow, or beg the loves which we cannot command. When a woman speaks so hungrily, she translates her heart. If it is so difficult to live truly with those whom we are constrained to love, how shall we accomplish anything with others whom we love only with an effort?"

"By increasing the velocity of our love."

"But how is that possible, Gabriel? The greatest lover of his kind cannot but acknowledge that people in the main are intensely vulgar—in cities especially. For me almost every sin is endurable, except that of vulgarity. It is the worst of all the vices, for it builds impassable barriers between man and man. In the work which I have undertaken of late I find this the most difficult offence to

forgive. Drunkenness I can put up with; vulgarity is final."

"Vulgarity is an inherited sin, and therefore no sin at all. These poor people do not mean to offend, and often have very warm hearts."

"You're right. Nevertheless, the man who ruins himself in some large way calls out my sympathy, whilst for your niggardly and unconscious sinner I have very little but contempt."

"It seems to me," said Gabriel, "that the prime mistake of ourselves and our age is that we are over-critical. To be properly tolerant one must have a keen sense of the comic. It sounds barbarous, I know, but it is my firm conviction that we are all far too serious. Where there is no humour there can be little charity."

"I don't see anything very comic about Kate's method of procedure," Lancaster replied. "I suppose I am too near at hand. Don Quixote is only amusing at long range; to have lived with him must have been very tragic. There are comedies which are too grotesque for anything but tears."

"Encourage yourself, then, by looking at long range," said Gabriel, laughing. "That is what I am going to do with regard to myself. I shall treat my present as though it were ancient history, and smile all I can."

"You'll be in danger of becoming a buffoon."

"I'd rather be that than a misanthropist."

"I shall find it very difficult to view life light-heartedly when you are gone, Gabriel. One thing which troubles me is that my charity costs other people so much—Hilda, for instance. It is terrible, this power which we possess over other people's lives."

"And it is grand! It is splendid that we should be compelled to die for one another. Hilda, I am sure, would not have it otherwise."

“Yet I wish,” said Lancaster sadly, “that you could have stayed with us.”

“Will you miss me so very much?”

“I hardly dare to say how much. Alas, the buried life!”

CHAPTER XV

PASTORALS AND A PEASANT

GABRIEL stepped to the window, and stood looking out into the night. He was alone in the house, the woman who had been engaged to care for his needs having returned to her dwelling shortly after his arrival.

When he had alighted in Monbridge, his nearest town, darkness had already gathered. He had been met by a neighbouring farmer, and driven for a matter of about five miles up a long, ascending road, below which curled and eddied the winding river, now swollen by reason of heavy falls of snow. The sombre Forest of Leaves stretched away on all sides, white, somnolent, and primeval, as though never soiled by the foot of man. The farmer was of middle age, taciturn, typically rustic, inclined to be suspicious of strangers. He vouchsafed nothing, when asked by whom he had been requested to meet the train, save that he had received his orders from another man.

After slow travelling and much climbing, they had reached the outskirts of a village, known as Wildwood. Here, bearing sharply off to the right, through trees, by an upland path, they had come to a small, two-roomed house, hemmed in the heart of the forest; perched on the brow of a hill; a square, terraced garden in front, which allowed a view, above branches, of a long and lonely length of the Whither, making its solitary way through woodland valleys to the westward sea.

This part of the country was new to him ; he looked down and wondered. Like a nest, between creepers of a high wall, the cottage hung amid trees, peeping out over three great counties of the West, which loops of the river here divide. In the dim, wintry light, spires and roofs of the ancient city of Monbridge could be just discerned. Here and there, at frequent intervals along the gorge, a flake of gold, ambushed in silver, glistened where some isolated cottager had kindled his lamp. Save for these quiet and rare signs of life, no hint of habitation disturbed the eye.

Like most town-bred men, Gabriel was unused to absolute solitude, finding it at once fascinating and terrific. He felt much the same as he had done as a little boy, when put to bed in a strange room ; only in this case there were no bed-clothes beneath which to hide. Every now and again a sigh would pass over the forest, and the branches would let fall snow, making a muffled sound like the tread of secret, naked feet. Shadows would creep from out the skirts of the clearing, and glide across the valley to the opposite slope, and stealthily retreat.

Gazing down to Monbridge, where companionable lights signalled and blazed, he entertained a sneaking craving for pavements and the roar of wheels. It came to him suddenly, as a forlorn revelation, that in all that many-homed city he had no part nor parcel. He pictured himself wandering through its gabled thoroughfares, peeping in at a window where the reflected glow of the firelight flared and flickered, watching groups of faces all unknown.

He shrugged his shoulders and went toward his own hearth, where one of the logs had tumbled and lay smouldering ; raising it up, he stirred it into flame. Nervous, by reason of his imaginings, he returned to the

window and drew down the blind, fearful of an in-gazing face.

“Come, this will never do,” he told himself. “I must get over this, or I shall spoil the object of my stay. If once I grow timid, there will be no peace.”

Sitting himself down and recalling old times (and old times are but yesterday, when one is lonely), he longed for Lancaster and the intimate undercurrent of his voice. What a fool he had been to make so little use of his friendship! He would give much to have John with him now.

All these thoughts, with banished memories of Helen, startled him like pistol-shots out of the past.

“Life is an odd medley of disappointment and surprise,” he sighed. “Who could have guessed, a year ago, that I should be here to-night?”

A commotion of trampled snow without, followed by the passing of many shadows, and the flashing of lights across the drawn blind, aroused him from his musings. Jumping up, he made toward the door. As he did so, the deep tones of men’s voices with a quaint, country perversion of vowels broke upon the stillness, raising the Christmas melody, “It came upon the midnight clear.” He flung wide his door, to discover the village choir in full blast, each one carrying a lantern.

On seeing him, they stopped as suddenly as they had begun, shuffling awkwardly with their feet, while a hoarse voice whispered, “There ’ee are, Thamas, I told ’ee he wouldn’t like it.”

An old man, leader of the party, came forward to Gabriel and explained. “See here, young maister, my name be Farmer Grew, and we fellers thought as how we’d like to welcome ’ee, and so we comed to sing ’ee some few poor toons, being all we knowed, ’cepting for those wastrel ones that baint no ways suited to the occasion. I says to

Thamas " (pointing to a burly outline), " I says to Thamas, ' let's go and sing him a Christian hymn ; maybe it'll make him feel more homelike.' So we comes."

While this explanation was in progress, the little band of minstrels had grown wider apart, man after man falling back into the darkness and mysteriously failing to occur again.

" Now, fellers, let's sing the young maister another toon to make him cheery-like," said Farmer Grew.

There was a prolonged silence, during which no voice replied. Farmer Grew, slowly turning around, discovered that all his comrades had fled. Setting down his lantern very deliberately, and taking off his cap, he rubbed his head thoughtfully awhile.

" Well, I'm danged ! " he growled. " What timid-'arted critturs they be. They wants to come, but they's afeared ; and when they comes, they runs away. We bain't used to townsfolk," he added apologetically ; " we wood-folk be a quiet people."

Gabriel pressed him to come in, but he refused, giving as excuse that he must go back and look after the truants, and give them a word of advice.

" Howbeit, young maister," he said, " we fellers be right glad to see 'ee, and we meant it kindly."

Gabriel watched his long shadow and the swinging of his light, until they were lost among the trees ; then, closing the door, he returned to his fire.

Somehow this clumsy act of rustic welcome caused him to feel glad ; for one thing, it had brought the thought of Christmas home to him. In the rush of these latest days he had forgotten the nearness of its approach. How would his mother spend the day, he wondered. She had always been one of those who had made it a festival of memory ; a day when she went courting with her nearest and best, renewing old tendernesses. He took out her

portrait, and looked at it. The long oval of the outline, the gentle lips, the wide sweetness of the eyes—a face with very little of distinction, perhaps, but very much of motherhood. “Poor mother,” he said, “she will miss me. Mothers pay a large price for the independence of their sons. I am free for the first time . . . I wonder whether I shall really like it.”

There are some kinds of captivity which are sweet bondage, and better than liberty. To search after freedom is to hunt for a great chimera, which very few gain, and, when they do, would often rather be without. Freedom, in man, means solitariness; and solitariness incompleteness. “Man is a social animal,” said Aristotle, laying down his fundamental principle, yet the great goal of much of modern ambition is to be unsocial. Gabriel, tintured by this same desire, had abandoned many pleasures that he might have solitude; already he had begun to find it irksome.

“Well, it is only for a few months,” he assured himself, “and then I’ll go back to Helen and the rest.”

Somehow he felt uncertain about a part of this assertion—that dealing with Helen.

“She’s much too good for me, and I’m afraid she begins to know it,” he said. “I’ll use my six months here, in trying to make my life more worthy of hers.”

A tap at the door caused him to break off in his reasonings, and to start from his seat. It was now past ten o’clock, an hour when most villagers are abed.

“Perhaps it’s old Farmer Grew,” he thought. “Come in,” he cried.

The door slowly opened, creaking on its hinges and letting in an icy draught.

“May I borrow a light, my lantern has gone out?” said a girl’s voice from without.

It was a pleasant musical voice, subdued and merry, like

the tinkling of many sheep-bells upon a mountain side, when the sun is shining. It had no trace whatsoever of peasant dialect.

Gabriel jumped up and hurried to the threshold, saying, "I am sorry. I beg your pardon. I did not know that it was a lady. Won't you come in while I light your lamp?"

"Oh, you needn't be so sorry," she laughed back at him. "I am not a lady, only a country girl. Yes, I will come in, it's been rather cold waiting out here."

"Did I keep you long waiting?" he asked innocently.

"Two or three minutes," she replied. "I think you must have been asleep, or else thinking very hard."

"I was thinking," he answered.

Without further ado she stepped into the circle of the firelight. Her hair was long and loose, jet black in colour and glistening with the frost. In contrast, her face was pale and delicate, the eyes of a timid grey and very bright. Her nose, hands, and mouth fine and slender. Her figure, somewhat above the average height for a woman, was slight. Her age about nineteen. Her general appearance wild and beautiful. Rusticity struggled with a strange sense of haughty refinement. She was an Undine born out of time and place.

Gabriel, having stayed behind to close the door, now followed her across the room to the hearth, where she knelt with her back towards him, warming her hands at the blaze. She did not look up as he approached, so he drew back his chair into the shadows and sat down to watch, with a rare fascination, her easy grace.

"You are comfortable in here," she said, "but it is bitter in the forest to-night. I feel wretched when I think of the suffering which the cold is causing to the dumb things and birds out there." She shivered as she spoke, for all that she herself was so near a fire, as if for

the moment, through her sympathy for them, she shared the pain of the wood creatures. Gabriel rose, and, leaning against the mantel, gazed down on her.

"I had not thought of them," he said, "yet, now that you mention it, I recall the description of such a night by one who did—

"‘Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold.’"

"‘The hare limp’d trembling through the frozen grass.’ What a picture of mournful, speechless suffering is there!"

"Oh, don't!" she cried, stooping lower above the flames, "it's too horrible to speak about. I could feel the ache of the frost grinding in my bones while you spoke, and the needles of frozen grass piercing into my naked feet as I crept away to die."

"I'm afraid you've taken a chill," he said. "What brought you out on such a night?"

She laughed at the practical turn which his conversation had taken. "Why, just that which you and I have been talking about—the misery of the wood-world. I could not sit still and be comfortable for thinking of it, so I came out to scatter some food here and there, and to see if I couldn't pick up any of the birds which have fallen out of their nests from cold and hunger."

"And have you found any?"

"Only one this time; but I have often saved as many as six on a single night."

From the folds of her dress she drew forth a robin red-breast; looking across her shoulder, she held it up to Gabriel. He bent down to take it into his hands; then, for the first time, she distinctly saw his face. Uttering a sudden cry of surprise, she leapt to her feet, allowing the bird to drop. It fluttered its way feebly toward the

flames, but she did not notice it. Gabriel, lest it should get burnt, stooped down and picked it up. When he looked again at his visitor, he saw that her gaze was still upon him, and that a puzzled expression had come into her eyes.

"What is your name?" she demanded breathlessly. When he had told her, she looked disappointed and said, "Then you are not Tony, and have never heard of the Green Boy, I suppose?"

He shook his head. "It is very strange that you are not Tony," she said. "Were you never in Wildwood before, not even once?"

"No, not even once," he said.

Gabriel was much amused at her persistency in questioning him. "I come from London, and have only just arrived. Why do you ask? Do you think that you have seen me somewhere before?"

Purposely ignoring the last part of his reply, "From London!" she cried. "And what made you leave London to come to this place which is so much less pleasant?"

"Because I thought that Wildwood was more beautiful, and I wanted to be quiet."

She opened her eyes with astonishment. "You came here to be quiet! Why, you must have made a mistake. The woods are full of voices; I live in the woods, and ought to know."

"But they're much more silent than the streets of a great city," retorted Gabriel, his eyes twinkling as he led her on. "Tell me, what kind of a place do you imagine London to be?"

"I hardly know how to put it into words; I have never tried to speak about it. It has been like a dream to me. I have seen it as a very large place, where there is so much noise that you don't notice it, not like woods where you hear and wait for every sound. And I have thought of it

as a place where there are so many people that no one sees you, so that you can become quite alone. I have always wanted to go to London, because no one would know me there."

"Oh dear," he groaned, "and has the modern spirit spread so far as this, that the first country girl I meet is tainted with it?" And then aloud, "Surely you don't mind being known? It must be rather nice to be known when you're young and admired."

He was sorry for what he had said, so soon as he had spoken. She lost the elfin naturalness which had made her charming, and flushed hotly; then hesitatingly said, "That is just my reason—I am not admired, and, therefore, don't want to be known. All the people who are unfortunate in our village go to London. They never come back; so I supposed that they must have found happiness there."

"No, not all of them."

"But you did?" she asked quickly, darting a keen look from under her eyes.

"Not always," he answered kindly.

She seemed disappointed, and shook her head, not wishing to believe. "I must have been mistaken then. It was only my own fancy, however; nobody told me."

"So you envy me the prison from which I have escaped?" he said. "Well, perhaps in three months' time I may be of your mind. We humans, unlike your wood animals, have not learnt how to suffer in silence; we are a querulous, uncomfortable race. We cannot even die without a noise, as has this little bird while we have been speaking together."

"Is it dead?"

"Quite dead. I'm afraid I held it too closely in my hand."

She took it from him, ruffling its feathers affectionately

against her face ; then hid it once more in her breast. She stooped for her lantern, and, picking a flaming twig from the hearth, rekindled the wick. She was about to go, when Gabriel stopped her, saying, "Isn't it somewhat late for you to be out alone? Had I not better accompany you?"

She shook her head and smiled whimsically, as if he had made a jest.

"Have you far to go?" he asked.

"Oh no, only half-a-mile or so through the woods to the back of the hill. I live at Folly Acre, and my name is Mary Devon."

"But your people may be anxious," he expostulated.

"My people won't be anxious. You need not worry about that. You must remember that I am only a country girl."

She spoke with a tinge of bitterness ; then, with a low curtsey, ran out into the night and vanished as suddenly as she had appeared.

When Gabriel followed, he could see nothing ; she was gone.

"Adventure number one," said he. "I wonder who she is. This is a strange forest where little princesses go gallivanting about alone at all hours of the night."

What had struck him most was the culture of her speech. Then, too, there was the evident narrowness of her upbringing, and consequent naïve ignorance of life.

"She has original notions of cities," he laughed, "and yet, in many ways, they are quite correct."

So saying, he lit his candle and went up to bed, there to sleep and dream of a fairy girl with long, black hair, and shadowy, alluring eyes, who carried a dead red-breasted bird in her bosom which had perished in the heat of his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

FOLLY ACRE FARM

THE following days passed quietly away in an orderly round of work and pleasure. Gabriel rose early and walked before breakfast, worked all the morning, went out again in the afternoon, and consumed his evenings reading. For a man who had never known what it was to live alone and have the meadows for a playground, every sun brought its novel and delicate sensation. No two days were alike; under the magic of cloud and climate the forest was for ever transferring its moods, and being animated by a new genius. It was like an irresponsible, lovely woman; weeping, laughing, and sullen by turns. He found it impossible to forecast what an hour might bring forth, so complex and transient were the emotions which such scenery produced in him. He had seen it under snow, and, now that the snow had melted, he saw it bare and barren; yet in all its aspects there was a savage and subtle charm. Even while it smiled, the scowl would pounce down and spread along the tree-tops from the mazy skyline of the sea; and, yet again, before it had become entirely angry, the sun would shower down his largess of gold through the mist, causing rivers and hillsides to laugh with merriment as in months of spring.

For hours at a stretch he was content to sit at his window, watching dreamily this newly discovered beauty, wearing away the hours without knowledge of their flight.

On the far side of the valley a railroad ran for a short distance around a bend in the river before again entering the tunnel, which carried it under the hills. This reminder of commerce and industry rather added to than detracted from his pleasure ; it kept him in memory of the turmoil he had lost, and the peace which he had won.

“There they go,” he would say to himself, “rushing from pillar to post, from London to Birmingham, from Birmingham to Bristol, from city to town, and from town to city, at the tail-end of a polluting, panting little piece of steel. I verily believe that men bandage their eyes when they travel ; or else, once having seen such spots as this, how can they ever come to leave them ? They have put all their hearts and souls into cash accounts and ledgers, God pity them ! I suppose, when the Recording Angel asks for a thumb-nail sketch of their earthly life they will point him to a row of figures and a manufacturing town.”

Thus he would watch day after day, until he caught the rumbling of the train in the mountains ; then he would laugh quietly, saying, “Here come the hucksters, poor devils ! I wonder what is the market price of human hearts to-day.”

While he was still looking, he would see a dun-coloured boat with a fisherman go idly drifting down the stream, slowly and sleepily, with no trace of hurry, anxious to disguise the least thought of motion ; and he would say, “There goes my lord the peasant. I can respect him.”

In this way he began to build up his philosophy of life, a Doctrine of Tranquillity whereby men might arrive at rest. The whole history of the place tended to merge man’s future into the giant march of the past, making foolish and vain too much strenuousness. “To speak a few good words and then die,” it seemed to say, “that is life.”

When he looked out through the valley, from the

window where he loved to work, the first array which focussed his eyes was the clustered reds and greys of the distant, stout old town, with its crumbled stronghold, home of kings' sons and birthplace of a king—men of valour, whose names, having lost their owners, have become a myth ; towers which lack inhabitants, and are tottering in decay.

The very paths, which threaded the woods around his house, had been marked out and trodden two thousand years before by the naked feet of forest Britons. Every cottage in the district was of great age, bearing chisellings made by hands long since turned to dust. The surrounding crests and uplands were studded for miles with castles, now in ruins, for whose entirety men had laboured and in whose defence they had died. Such things as the bygone race had cherished had everywhere succumbed to the defacing levellings of Time. All this tended to prove the futility of feverish effort. "What matters it whether it be one book more, or one castle less ?" he said ; "they will all be equally forgotten. Men come and men go, but the seasons are the same. I, for one, will be content to speak my few good words, and then to die."

Several days had now gone by, and he had seen nothing of his maiden marauder. In the country, where interests are limited, small intrusions take on a mighty importance. Gabriel waited eagerly to see her come, and at last, being disappointed, set out in her search.

It was a grey day and already well on in the afternoon when he turned into the forest to follow over the hill. He had walked, perhaps, a quarter of a mile, when he saw a man approaching through the glade, reading as he came. He was a big, gaunt fellow, wide of shoulder, dressed in black, of almost any age. His countenance was long and lean, covered toward the lower extremity with a grizzled growth of beard. He carried in his right hand a gnarled

stick, on which he leant heavily, and stammered in his steps, being pitifully lame at the knee. When Gabriel drew level with him he noticed that half of the left hand, which clasped the book, had been shot away—probably in the same gun accident which had done the other damage. He wore a tie of flaming red, and the book which he carried was Bunyan's *Holy War*. His general appearance was belligerent, somewhere between that of a Methodist preacher and a prosperous poacher. His expression, at first glance stern and forbidding, became almost womanish in its tenderness, as is the way with strong men, when the blue eyes commenced to snap and twinkle. It was the face of a young man become suddenly old ; so that, though he would be judged an old man by most, yet in years he might not have passed mid-life.

Irresistibly, at sight of him, the memory came back to Gabriel of Shelton's quaint translation of a passage referring to Don Quixote : " And the other, beholding such an Anticke to hover over him . . . " He felt inclined to laugh outright.

" Good-afternoon," said the stranger, in a soft tenor voice of unexpected sweetness, altogether out of keeping with his looks. " I think you are a newcomer to these parts."

" Yes," replied Gabriel ; " that is so. I have been here less than a week."

" I shall hope to see you again. I conjecture that you are stopping at the cottage down there."

Gabriel nodded, and the stranger made as though he would have passed on, again resuming his book.

" Pardon me," said Gabriel, " but could you direct me to Folly Acre Farm ? I am not sure of the way."

At the mention of the farm the stranger looked up shrewdly, and remained looking for some seconds, deciphering Gabriel's character from his face ; then, with an

ingenuous air of doubt which put all impudence out of the question by its simplicity—

“Do you think that you ought to go there?”

“I know of no reason why I should not. Do you?”

“No; perhaps not. You will find the farm a little way up this path, just under the lee of the hill.”

Following his directions, Gabriel shortly came to an opening in the trees, some twenty acres in extent, in the middle of which stood an ancient, grey-stone house. It wore about it an air of desertion, all the shutters of the windows exposed to his view being closed, the farmyard empty, and the fields apparently uncultivated. It looked less of a farm than a castle, for it was stoutly constructed with an eye to defence and had every opening grated.

He walked up the moss-grown path to the front door, and found it locked. He knocked and waited; but no one answered. He was half-minded to turn away, thinking that he had made a mistake. Before doing so it occurred to him that it might be as well to visit the back parts of the building, since he might unearth some one there who could redirect him. Here he found a high wall, jutting out from the house itself, and forming a rectangle about a well-kept flower and kitchen garden. One of the rooms on this side was evidently in use, the windows being hung with curtains, and the door ajar. Through the bare branches of the currant bushes, at the far end of the enclosure, he espied a stooping figure which rose up at sound of his voice, proving to be Mary Devon herself.

“So you live here, after all!” he cried. “Pray, what are you doing at work all alone at this hour of the day?”

“If you were a countryman you’d see at a glance,” she called back. “I’m pulling up parsnips.”

Walking across the damp mould he came to where she

stood, resting on her spade. She had a pair of wooden clogs on her feet, and wore a dull green gown of a coarse material, shaped round the neck and bound with gold braid, hanging loose to the ground except for where it was gathered in by a leathern girdle at the waist.

“Have you got no one to help you?” he asked. “That basket will be pretty heavy to carry by the time you’ve done.”

“Whom should I have? I live alone.”

“Oh, I see,” he said vaguely. “In that case I’d better help you.”

“You help me!” she laughed, looking him down with a pretty disdain. “What do you know about agriculture? I don’t believe you’ve ever handled a spade in your life.”

“Then it’s time I learnt.” He took the spade from her, and commenced to scatter the earth.

“Well, if you must,” she sighed, with affected reluctance, seating herself on the upturned basket; and then, clapping her hands, “Oh, I wish that the Green Boy might see how beautifully you do it! There won’t be any garden left presently; it’ll all be over in the next field.”

“That’s right,” he said. “You do the talking. I’ll do the work.”

“What shall I talk about? I know so few people that I hardly know what to say. There are whole days together when I never open my mouth to a living soul.”

“But how is that? I’ve seen plenty of cottagers near by in the woods. You should have some kind of company.” And then severely, “It isn’t proper for a young girl like you to be living alone.”

“That’s just it,” she replied good-naturedly, smiling at his boyish seriousness; “I expect that’s one reason why they leave me so much to myself. But I can’t expect you to understand, because you don’t know.”

Gabriel flung down the spade, and straightened out his shoulders. "I wish I might know," he said. "Would you mind telling me?"

"I don't suppose it would interest you," she replied, tantalizing him, and manifesting no desire to begin.

"Oh yes, it would ; and then, you know, I might be able to help you."

"Would you like me to tell my story? All right then, we can leave our gardening to another day. Let's go into the house, there's a fire there, and I'll tell you how it all came about."

The room which they entered from the garden was a large and old-fashioned hall, which had in recent years been converted into a kitchen. A big, open fire-place of red brick, upon which was sculptured the motto, "Semper Morare," filled up a large part of one side. The walls were panelled, and elaborately carved. The furniture, all of an early date, consisted of oak chests and settles arranged around the walls, interspersed with high-backed chairs.

At the far end, facing the entrance, a minstrel gallery ran from side to side—forlorn reminder of merrier days. In one corner of the room stood a bed, making evident that this was the sole inhabited room of the house.

Everywhere was evinced a scrupulous tidiness, in striking contrast to the outside unkempt decay.

Having made comfortable her guest, she set about preparing tea.

She looked girlish and winning as she went about her task, making Gabriel feel very much at home by her free and innocent remarks.

When all things were ready, and she had taken her place opposite to him, Gabriel asked, "And how did you come to live here?"

"Well, that's a part of my story, so if you want to hear

a part you must listen to the whole. I've never told quite everything to any one, except Mr. Meredith; but somehow I like you, and should care to tell you, that is if you don't mind."

"I'm only too anxious," Gabriel replied, "and I'm secret as the grave."

It was for all the world as though his life had been pushed back ten years, and he was a little lad again, exchanging inviolable confidences with a child sweetheart.

"Well, then, here is the story."

"But one minute," interrupted Gabriel. "Who is Mr. Meredith?"

"He is a gentleman who lives in the village, and does a great deal of good. He has travelled quite a lot, and lived here as a boy. There was some mistake, I don't know what; he left suddenly, but returned five years ago, and has been here ever since. He is lame, and has had some dreadful accident to his hand, and is the only person whom I can call my friend."

"He must be the man I met on my way."

"Did you speak to him or tell him where you were going?" she asked excitedly.

"Yes, and he didn't seem to like it."

"He's always like that. He doesn't think I ought to live alone, and is always trying to persuade me to sell the old farm and move down into the village to be near to where he is; but I always refuse. I try to avoid meeting people; they never speak to me, so I don't see why I should get any nearer to them. Besides, I'm very happy as I am, and can live my own life."

"What is your own life? Living here by yourself from year's end to year's end with no companion?"

"Something like that. But if you'll only listen I'll tell you."

“All right, I’ll be really very quiet now. I won’t say a word, so please begin.”

“Well, in the first place, I want you to understand my reason for telling at all. You see, I’ve lived here ever since I can remember, and, except for Mr. Meredith, have never met any one from the big, outside world, so I hardly know how they think and what they consider right. The peasants refuse to have any dealings with me, so I have always been left to myself, and am quite ignorant of other people. I want to be frank with you, so I’m going to tell you how it was that I happened to visit you a few days ago. My lantern never went out at all; I blew it out in order that I might have an excuse for seeing you. Are you angry with me?”

“No, of course not. I expect I’ve done things like that myself many a time. But what made you want to see me so badly?”

“Mr. Meredith had told me that a stranger was coming from London to occupy his cottage; so I was curious to see what you were like, and didn’t know how to set about it; so invented that way. I’m sorry I did it now. It seems so mean to commence a friendship with a lie.”

“Oh, you needn’t be sorry about that. I quite understand your loneliness, and then, friendships are so hard to get started anyway, that it’s quite lawful to set them going in the best way you can. So my cottage belongs to Mr. Meredith, does it?”

“Yes; he lets it out to artists and people who come here to stop in the summer-time; and, in the winter, he allows poor people to live there who haven’t got anywhere else to go.”

“Does he, though?” said Gabriel ruefully. “I must be one of them.”

She gave a sigh of relief, saying, “You don’t think any the less of me for my trick?”

“Not a particle. If you hadn’t done it I shouldn’t be here now, and you would have been just as lonely as ever. But what I can’t understand is why you should be left by yourself. I wish you’d tell me.”

She folded her hands across her knees, and leant back dreamily, looking into the fire. “To tell you the truth, I don’t quite know. No one has ever told me. Ever since I can remember I have lived in this house in much the same way. Mother used to be with me, but she died three years ago. She never spoke much about herself, but she would often tell me about our family, and how it was one of the oldest in the county, and had lived on this farm from generation to generation, for hundreds of years.

“In the winter-time, when we sat together at night, she would sometimes go on for hours together with the most wonderful stories of how one of our people had fought for King Charles and gone into exile with the princes. And of another who had followed the Duke and had fallen at Sedgemoor. And of others who had taken to the sea, and sailed privateers, and been captured and carried off to France in the time of Napoleon. She rarely ever spoke about her own father and mother; and, when she did, it was only to cry bitterly and say that she had been their death. Then she would be very kind to me, and hold me in her arms till I fell asleep; and next morning, when I woke, and reminded her of it, she would pretend that she had forgotten all about it. Have you got a mother?”

“Yes.”

“Is she a good mother?”

“The best in the world.”

“I wish you could have known my mother. She was the sweetest, kindest sort of mother. When we hadn’t got much food in the house she would say that she wasn’t hungry. When I was a very little girl I believed her; but, when I grew older, I knew what that meant, and

loved her all the more. I suppose you've never known what it is like to be poor?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't; at least, not quite so poor as that."

"Of course we needn't have been, I see that now, if we'd only chosen to work our fields. But Mother seemed to be frightened of having people about her. She never left the house, except by night; and towards the end, not even then. Whenever I came back from being away for a few hours she would meet me at the door looking quite worn with worry, and would say in a whisper, 'Have you spoken to any one, Mary? Oh, tell me, have you spoken to any one?' And even when I told her that I hadn't, she would still be troubled and question me again and again. 'Are you quite sure?' I soon discovered that the easiest way to put her doubts to rest was to run and throw my arms about her, and then she would sob and say, 'It's all right; I can see it's all right; you are still my own little girl.' And so in this way I grew up to think that I should be doing something very wicked if I spoke to our neighbours. I took to walking in the woods rather than the roads or paths, because I couldn't bear to meet people; they used to look at me so hard. The peasants soon took us for granted and left us alone; so I have never known any one except Mother, and Mr. Meredith, and you."

Gabriel felt grateful for this latest inclusion.

"But why didn't your mother want you to know any one?"

"I have never been able to find out. She said that every one was cruel, and that the world was cruel, and that the only way in which to get peace was to live by ourselves. I sometimes think that she didn't tell me all."

"Was she an old woman?"

"Mother an old woman! Oh no. She was the youngest

and most beautiful person I have ever seen. She could sing and play, and do many things that I can't do. I think she had travelled too, for she used to say things that I could not understand in another tongue, and sing them. When I got older, I was always asking her to teach me to read and to sing; but she never would. And when I begged her again she would tell me that such things were only a danger, and that she would be happier without them."

"How did she speak? Like the rest of the people who live here?"

"No, not one bit. I can't say what the difference was, but her voice was softer, and somehow the words sounded not the same when she said them."

"You say she died three years ago?"

"Yes, she seemed to get weaker and thinner; and then one morning I woke up, and she did not speak. I went and told Mr. Meredith, and when he came, he said that she was dead."

"You said just now that you had never spoken to anybody. How was it then that you got to know Mr. Meredith?"

"We didn't know any one until he returned to the village; and, at first, Mother was very angry with him for coming, and would shut the door, and pretend she didn't know that he was there; but he used to say, 'Very well, I'll just wait.' I've known him to sit out in the garden for three hours in the cold until at last Mother lost patience, and let him in. At first he was always trying to persuade her to work the farm and send me to school in Monbridge; but when he saw how it grieved her, he gave it up."

"But didn't you want to meet people and to learn about the world? You can't live here in this solitary fashion all your life."

“When Mr. Meredith first mentioned it to Mother, I used to think that I would, and we used to plead with her, and he would even offer to pay ; but now I have made friends of my own in the woods, among the birds and the trees, I begin to feel as she felt—frightened of the big world, so that I do not want to change. I am quite content to live and die as I am. When I was fretful, and complained, and said that I longed to have friends and to see things, Mother used to point to the family motto up there, and say, ‘If I had only obeyed that I should have been happier to-day ; all my misfortunes have come through trying to change things. Learn to be content with what you’ve got, and you’ll learn to live well.’

“I didn’t quite believe her then ; but now, whenever I feel wretched and as though I must speak to some one, I look up at the words, as Mother used to do, and say, ‘Always delay.’ I feel as though something terrible will happen to me if I don’t obey them ; and so I stay on.”

“But that’s foolishness. You shouldn’t be governed by your superstitions. If you were to sell up the farm or rent it out, you would have quite enough to get educated on ; and afterwards, if you liked, you could return.”

“But I don’t want to be educated. Mother said that learning brought sadness, and I believe her. She used to spend hours trying to find out what I thought, and then talking with me about it. She never laughed at anything I said, and never contradicted me. She said that all thoughts were in themselves right ; and that it was only the way in which we said and did them, that made them wrong. She taught me to speak aloud to myself, and said that if I did that I should never be lonely.”

“So that is how you come to speak so well ?” All this while Gabriel had been wondering how it was that a girl who had lived so solitarily and was possessed of so little learning, could express herself in such fashion.

“Do you really think I speak well?” she asked delightedly. “I am so glad I have pleased you.”

“Hark! what is that?” he interrupted, jumping up. While she had been speaking, he had caught the crunch of footsteps on the path outside. Before she could answer, the door opened, and Meredith stood upon the threshold, huge and unnatural, framed in the grey of a winter’s sky.

CHAPTER XVII

PEACE

THE afternoon had worn away quickly as they talked; evening was already tumbling down the sky, casting long shadows as he fell. That peculiar nocturnal quiet, so proper to a land of tree-clad hills, was abroad, laying a silencing hand on every sound.

“Peace be upon this house,” said the man in the doorway; and then, as if in gratitude for a prayer already answered, “Hush, I hear the peace of the Lord in the tree-tops, and the measure of His might among the hills.”

His voice thrilled as he spoke with the suspicion of a sob, and he repeated, “The measure of His might among the hills.” He stood with his head bared and bowed, his hands before his eyes, motionless; till, to Gabriel’s hearing, the valley sighed with content and the forest echoed at the footfall of a majestic presence.

Having entered the room, he limped over to where she sat, and taking her face between his hands, looked into it and kissed her forehead very tenderly, saying, “Mary, little child, have you yet found Him? There is no peace until He comes.”

“No, Dan, not yet. I’m afraid I never shall.”

“Be patient. He knows His own. He will come some day.” Then, seeing Gabriel, “I beg pardon, Mr. Garrod, I did not know that you were here. So you have discovered my little friend.”

“Yes, Dan,” she broke in eagerly, “he has been here all the afternoon. I have been telling him all about myself, and he has actually been interested.”

Meredith did not reply at once, but selecting a stool, sat himself down between the two of them, a little way back from the blaze.

“So you’ve been telling him all about yourself? Whenever any one does that it is interesting. How much have you told her, Mr. Garrod?” turning toward Gabriel.

“Nothing at all. I’ve spent my time in listening and giving good advice. I think she ought not to go on stopping in a big house like this all by herself.”

“Perhaps she ought, and perhaps she ought not; sometimes I think one thing and sometimes another. At all events, so long as she is here, she is out of mischief and keeps good.”

“Oh, Dan, are you still at the old tale? I don’t think I’m very good, and I don’t expect to be much worse wherever I may be. Is the world such a wicked place?”

“It’s pretty bad. What do you say, Mr. Garrod?”

“It isn’t so much wicked as stupid. That’s what makes me love the country; you can be just as foolish as you like here, and there’s no one to see you, so it doesn’t much matter.”

“I’ve not done much studying of late, sir, and I can’t say that I catch your meaning. If you mean that sin is sin in one place, and that it is something else in another, I don’t agree with you. I came back to Wildwood, after many years of wandering, in order that I might do something to patch up just one of those follies which you call stupidities.”

“Where did you go to all those years, you’ve never told me anything about them?” asked Mary.

“That’s a long story, girlie, and I don’t feel that I want

to tell it to-night. I'd rather hear what brought Mr. Garrod among us."

"That's soon explained. I came because I wanted to write; and, by the way, I believe you're the owner of the cottage I'm staying at. Can you tell me the name of the man who engaged it?"

"I'm afraid I can't. It isn't my secret. I received my orders from London, and did as I was bid. First of all, I had a telegram inquiring if the cottage was vacant, and, afterwards, a letter and cheque to cover a six months' rental. I was requested to tell you nothing, should you question me."

"Hm!" said Gabriel. "I wish I knew his name; a name does so much to clothe a personality."

"If I were you, Mr. Garrod, I shouldn't worry myself to try and find out. What does it matter? It's just one more step in the dark. I am never so happy as when I can't see where I'm going; it makes me more certain of the Guiding Hand."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Gabriel irritably, "I dare say you are. I suppose that's just how you would feel. You appear to have gained some sort of a belief. I have not; that's why I'm here—to procure one, and there's the difference."

"I'm an old man, sir, in age, if not in years. All my days I've travelled in search of peace. From the Atlantic to the Pacific I've journeyed. I've been rich and I've been poor. Through it all, I was never at peace until I got just that sort of a belief—the belief in the Guiding Hand."

"I can understand and sympathize with you in all that you have said, Mr. Meredith. Nevertheless the one thing which stands distinct in my own mind is that every man comes at his own peace in his own way: you by religion, another through power, this man by reading books, that man by writing them."

"No, sir, I don't allow it. There are many paths, I own, but they all have to meet at one point before they can run on together as one."

"You remind me," said Gabriel hastily, "of an old woman who, having by some quack remedy disposed of one complaint, thinks that it will cure every known disease."

"I didn't mean to offend, I assure you, Mr. Garrod. When a man has been at death's door himself, and has been at the last minute saved, if he's anything of a man, he isn't particular about manners when he thinks he can do the same for some one else who is suffering in a similar way. That's my case, and I think the latter is partly yours."

He spoke so quietly that Gabriel felt ashamed of his hurried display.

"Look here, Mr. Meredith, I'm sorry. I'm sure you meant well, and I appreciate your motives."

"Aye, laddie, your appreciation may be very well for me, but it can't do much for you. When I was a young chap I did a lot of appreciating, but it wasn't until I believed something that I found peace."

"The world would believe anything that you cared to tell it, if you could guarantee that it would bring men peace."

"And that I can, to any man who chooses to listen. As a young chap I did too much searching and not enough listening; now I listen all my days."

"Do you for one minute understand what you are saying? All through the ages men have been looking for just this thing. Go into any town or city, and you will see men and women hurrying up and down the streets, looking for this peace of which you speak. You get a man by himself, and commence to speak with him: what is it that he talks about? It's always the same thing—how one day or another he is going to buy peace. Every

boy and girl who fall in love think they've got it. Every suicide believes that he is going to secure it. What do you suppose men live in towns for? It isn't because they like them; it is in order that they may scrape up enough money to purchase peace. What makes men so hard and unscrupulous in business? It's because they know that there's only a certain amount of money in the world, and they think that money means peace. This is what makes scholars grow old at poring over books; they want to discover the secret. And this is what leads fellows like myself to torture themselves into writing a book—they think that by getting their thoughts outside themselves they may arrive at peace. Most of our follies grow out of this one desire. People steal and go to gaol for it. Merchants work night and day, and die at fifty for it. If a man can't get peace by fair means, he tries to by foul. If he can't buy, he plans to steal. If he isn't strong enough to take it from a live man, he kills him, and takes it from a dead. Every misfortune results from this endless pursuing of peace. I wonder that we have the courage to go on searching, where generations have failed."

"What you have said I believe to be true," answered Meredith; "yet it still remains that where one poor fellow like myself has succeeded there is room for others to do the same."

"We all have our stars which we are born and bound to follow," said Gabriel, "but where to, we never can tell. So far I have followed myself."

While they had been speaking, instinctively they had drawn nearer together around the hearth, and now remained silent, no one looking at another. Mary spoke, her face cushioned in her hands, her eyes fixed on the flame. "And so your star led you from London to Wildwood; and Dan's led him all over the world, and brought him back to the place from which he had started; and mine

stands stationary all my life, over Folly Acre. Now they have brought us all three together—I wonder what for ! It is very wonderful. How can such things be explained ? ”

“ I don’t try to explain them ; I simply follow,” said Gabriel.

“ And I couldn’t explain them if I tried ; so I delay,” said Mary, looking up at the motto.

“ And I know that it is the Lord,” said Meredith.

“ It must be grand to think that you know,” said Gabriel. “ I wish that I had that sensation of certainty ; it does away with all feverishness.”

“ It does. It took me many years to gain it ; but it was all worth while, every step of the way.”

“ And what are you doing here in Wildwood ? if you don’t mind my asking,” said Gabriel.

“ Living quietly, sir, and preaching the Word.”

“ That’s only a half-answer, Dan,” interrupted Mary, and, turning to Gabriel—“ I’ll tell you what he does ; he goes round to all the markets and fairs and villages, and preaches. Sometimes he’s listened to, and sometimes he isn’t. He spends a good deal of his time on the main-road between Monbridge and Siluria, because that’s where most of the tramps and out-of-work farm-hands go by. When he sees one coming whom he thinks he can help he gets into talk with him, and takes him home, and keeps him there for a day or two, trying to do him good. No, Dan, it’s not a bit of use you’re signalling to me to stop, for I’m not going to until I’ve said my say. He’s so tender-hearted that he gives everything he has away. Last year, in the depth of winter, he hadn’t an overcoat left to his back. When he came to Wildwood, five years ago, the villagers made fun of him ; but now they worship him, and there isn’t one of them who wouldn’t gladly starve that he might eat.”

“ There, there, maidie, that’s enough,” said the old man

kindly, taking her hand in his. "Because you love me you mustn't think that everything I do is good. I'm really a very selfish fellow. I do these things to other people because it makes me happy—which isn't much to my credit."

"I wish I had as much to mine," said Gabriel with conviction. "It's a terrible thing to think how much power to make or mar one another each one of us has. Even when you're most anxious to make the best of yourself for the sake of others, and have come to a decision, and begun to walk along a way, you can never be sure, until the end has been reached and it's too late, whether it was the right road after all. If you do as Mary here, sit down and delay, the chances are that you'll grow into a habit and die where you sit. And if you do as I'm doing, strike out boldly for yourself, the world's so crowded that you're almost certain to crush some one in forcing a passage. I get very perplexed when I think over these things. To live is to bear a terrible responsibility; I don't wonder that there are some who prefer to die."

"Yes," said Meredith, "and the sad thing is that the ones who give up are often among the best. Your brutish, selfish man is content to fill his belly and have a fat time at anybody's and everybody's expense. He hangs on as long as there's anything to eat and drink, and any money to be earned or stolen. It's your fine, tender-souled fellow who goes under and loses courage, because he's too kind-minded to trample his way into either downright villainy or thorough-paced virtue. Most of the men on the roads are good men; that's why they're there, and that's why I love them and take them into my house. Somehow or other I can't get it out of my mind that Christ was once upon the road, and one can never be sure that He won't be there again. It's come to

me over and over that the best men in this life are not the men who win out; the men who do that are only the second, the third best, and the worst. The really good man usually goes to the wall, because he is so good. To my way of thinking it's right and proper that he should, and in accordance with Scripture usage; for such treatments are the despisings and persecutions our Lord spoke of on the mountain. The only fault I have to find is that most folk aren't careful enough that they are persecuted for His sake.

"I remember coming across such a man years ago, when I was working in a lumber camp out in the Canadian Rockies. He was a small, slim chap, with fair hair and eyes; we called him 'The Child,' because he had such tiny hands and feet. Not that he was so very young, either; he must have been somewhere around forty. I took a liking to him at first sight. By and by he opened out, and told me a few things about himself. He was just one of those men who set out too well, and then haven't the strength of purpose to carry them through. It appeared that his father had been a rich mill-owner, somewhere up Lancashire way, who had died early, leaving him the entire property. The Child was about twenty-two at that time, and engaged to be married to a pretty girl. Unfortunately for him, he suffered from a painful sense of his obligations, and was always worrying over the good and harm which he had it in his power to exercise over his work-people. He was one of those big-hearted, small-brained men, whose mind and affections are for ever getting into a tangle. The more he thought, the faster his emotions unwound; the faster his emotions unwound, the more he thought—his heart and mind were one gigantic muddle. His father had never known that there were such things as obligations, and had accordingly run the mills at a profit both to himself and his people.

“The upshot of it was that the Child went about every day thinking ; and couldn’t sleep of nights for thinking over again what he had already thought by day.

“At last he came to the conclusion that it wasn’t right for one man to own the whole concern, while the work-people got nothing but wages. He called them together, and offered them an interest in the mills. They, seeing the kind of man he was, with his pale eyes and tiny feet and hands, listened, and agreed to whatever he chose to say. What this was I never quite made out, but I expect it consisted largely of how he loved them, and how all men ought to be brothers, and how he was going to hand the entire business over to them, and trust them, as a brother should, to give him his proper share. It worked out quite differently. The mill-hands collared all the profits and got drunk, and, when the Child came before them in his nervous, tearful way to ask for his share, they kicked him out. Then the father of the girl he was going to marry got to hear of it, and asked him what all this nonsense meant. When the Child explained that it meant that he had lost all his money the father told him a few straight truths about his business qualifications, and also kicked him out.

“The Child was always a delicate-minded chap, and, when this happened, blamed himself because he made sure that the pretty little girl would break her heart because of him, and never recover from the blow. So what must he do but go and book his passage to Canada, and, just before sailing, write her a letter saying how he was going to make his fortune, and return in a few years and marry her, all the same. It wasn’t until he’d got well out to sea that it occurred to him that before those few years were up she might get another chance to marry, and might be prevented from doing so by the pledge he’d given her in that letter. Then he began to tangle up his

conscience worse and worse, all the way across the Atlantic, thinking and loving all the way. By the time he'd got to the mouth of the St. Lawrence he'd made up his poor mind that it was his duty to write her a second letter, making out that the first one was sent in play, and that he'd never intended to come back. For quite a long while, for several years in fact, he remained happy in the belief that he had acted quite honourably.

“One day, when he'd almost ceased to worry, he joined a railroad gang, and found amongst them a waster from the Old Country who'd known his family in Lancashire. The Child began to talk with him, and found that the girl was still unmarried, and was said to be eating her heart out for love of him. Then he began to think what a brute he'd been, and how he'd done wrong in sending her that last letter; and thereupon set to work to conjure up all the agony she must have suffered, and to wonder how he could put things right. As I said before, he was one of those small-brained, big-hearted fellows, whose brains and affections are for ever rolling up into a tangle. What must he do, but sit down and write her a third letter. This time he says to himself, ‘She's very lonely and miserable; I must do something to make her hopeful and happy.’ So he told her how he was getting on splendidly, and growing richer and richer every day; and still loved her, and, if she was willing, wanted to come back and marry her in a year or two.

“Now the Child wasn't the sort of man who is ever going to make money; he wasn't enough of a fox to steal, or sufficient of a squirrel to keep what he'd got. However, he went on year after year, drifting from one job to another, never making anything to speak of, getting more and more despondent, but always writing back to his pretty little girl, who was getting a pretty old girl by this time, that he'd be coming home soon, when he'd

made one last big pile. If ever there was a man who hated a lie it was the Child, and yet, because years ago, out of sheer goodness of heart, he'd told his one untruth, he was condemned to go on lying every day of life.

“When I found him in the lumber camp this had been going on for twenty years. He didn't tell me his story all at once: it slipped out in pieces when we were alone. At last the poor old maid got sick and tired of his promises, and spoke out her mind to him very bitterly, saying how he'd devastated her life, and stolen her love, and left her nothing to live for. He was emptied right out, like a sail when the wind stops blowing. He came to me, and, before showing me her letter, put me on my oath to tell him whether it was true. What was I to do? I let him down just as lightly as I could. ‘As for devastating her life,’ I said, ‘I dare say from her point of view that is true; and as for stealing her love, she gave it to you in the first instance, and, although perhaps it might have been more honourable to have given her it back, yet to keep what has been given can hardly be called theft. As for having left her nothing in the world to live for, I'm not in a position to give an opinion, for I don't know the lady.’ ‘I think I see what you're trying to hide,’ said the Child, clasping and unclasping his nervous, smallish hands. ‘Thank you for telling me the truth. I wish some one had done it earlier. Good-bye; thank you so much.’ I tried to stop him, and asked him where he was going. He looked pale and tired, quite unfit for a journey. ‘I'm not going very far,’ he answered, and walked away into his shack. I waited outside for a minute or two, not knowing what was best to do. Just as I was about to turn away there was a report, and a thin wisp of smoke.”

“And what had happened?” asked Mary, breathless with expectation.

“Dead—by his own hand,” Meredith replied; “with her last letter beside him.”

“And yet he seemed to be a good man,” she whispered.

“Yes; and he was, too,” answered Meredith almost fiercely. “He was one of the kindest, gentlest little fellows I ever knew.”

“He was afraid of his responsibilities,” said Gabriel; “the obligations of living were too much for him.”

“That was just it,” replied Meredith. “And yet it seems to me better to be so aware of life’s responsibilities that you’re afraid of them, than never to be aware of them at all.”

“But which man does the least harm, I wonder?” asked Gabriel, for in truth he could refer much of what had been narrated to his own life.

“The man who has most love,” answered Mary. “And I should say that, in spite of all, he has most peace.”

They were words lightly spoken, which Gabriel was to remember with comfort on a future day.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW THE SUN SHONE CHRISTMAS DAY

It was Christmas morning. The windows were heavily frosted with quaint and curious patterns, and the sun was gazing in when Gabriel awoke. Down below in the valley the matin bells of St. Dubricious were ringing a peal of thanksgiving and happiness ; save for this there was no sound nor stir. He lay very still, enjoying one of those rare psychological moments of perfect tranquillity which sometimes come unbidden and unaccounted for, a gift from the gods or the fairies, when some of the quietness of sleep laps over and distributes through the conscious life of new day. "I am young, I am young, I am young, and this is the country, the country," the bells seemed to say over and over, till his heart was fulfilled with gladness. "What shall I do, what shall I do, what shall I do? Let me worship, worship, worship." The chimes died away and gave place to the toll : "Worship, worship, worship."

Now Gabriel had never worshipped, at least not in words, since he had won himself free from his mother's control. Of course he had gone to church to please her, and had pretended to listen, and had bowed his head when the other people bowed ; but that is another matter. He didn't much believe in prayer, and couldn't see any use in it. He'd studied philosophy pretty thoroughly, and, being a boy, had mistaken it for religion. He wanted to do well for himself, and for the world at large. He

was filled with a generous desire to make grievous people glad, and to leave things better than he had found them ; but why he wanted to do all this he could not say, except that he admired Christ very much, and felt that it would be grand to be like Him. When the bells commenced to speak it came to him as a surprise. "I don't know what to say," he muttered.

"Worship, worship, worship," answered the village bell persistently.

He turned over on his side, smiling at the hallucination, and, stealing another wink of sleep, had the most curious of dreams. He thought that he was standing all alone upon a snow-covered moor, and yet not he, for when he looked down in search of his hands and feet there was nothing there ; he was only a pair of eyes, which he couldn't see, for they were looking and looking. Then, as he watched, he saw a man clamber over the edge of the skyline. He was dressed in a long robe of purple, with a shirtlet of crimson. His feet were bare ; his face was strangely familiar ; in his arms he carried a little, naked child, which he held to his naked breast to warm it against the cold. The eyes, which were all that there were left of Gabriel, kept quite still, always gazing upon the traveller, who came very swiftly on toward a hut from which smoke was slowly rising, which the eyes had just perceived at the opposite end of the moor. The stranger came to the door and tapped ; a woman answered his call. She held out her arms, and, taking the child, kissed and snuggled it close to her bosom. She looked up to thank the stranger, but saw him a long way off, walking back toward the skyline ; and the eyes noticed that every time he placed his foot into an old print it was blotted out and became pure white, like the rest of the snow. Soon the man came again to the horizon, but this time he halted reluctantly, looking back over the way which he had come. The woman at the

door stood looking also. Suddenly he spread out his arms on either side, casting a long, black shadow across the snow, which, reaching the place where the woman stood, touched with its uttermost length the child in her arms, who, waking up, began to wail.

When the eyes looked again, the shadow and hut, and woman and child, had all vanished—there was nothing but the lonely moor; whereupon Gabriel awoke.

“Why, that was Mother,” he said to himself as he opened his eyes, “and I must have been the child! I wonder whether dreams have ever any meaning, and whether that one had?”

The village bell was still ringing, “Worship, worship, worship.” He jumped out of bed, and stepping to the window, opened it wide. As he did so, the distant swell of the Monbridge chimes floated merrily up to him, singing, “Christmas Day, Christmas Day, Christmas Day,” upon which the village bell broke in with a sullen bass, “Worship, worship, worship.”

“Well, if a man can’t pray on Christmas Day he isn’t good for much,” thought Gabriel; whereupon he went upon his knees, and, folding his hands said, “Thank you,” very devoutly.

He dressed quickly, whistling as he did so, wondering what they were doing at the Turnpike, and how they would keep the festival.

On coming down-stairs he saw at once that he must have overslept; breakfast was laid and the dishes were set by the fireside to keep warm.

Another thing which he immediately noticed was that some one had been busy decorating his room since last night. There were bunches of holly and greenery everywhere, and, on the table at the place where he sat, a small brown paper parcel—a book of some kind.

“Hulloa, who’s been here so early in the morning, giving me presents?” thought Gabriel, much amused.

Ripping the paper off he found it to be a cheap edition of *A Child’s First Spelling Book*, such as can be bought in a village store. There was no name or message to say from whom it came.

“They showed sound literary judgment, anyhow,” he laughed, and sat down to his meal.

Presently a passing cottager brought him his Christmas mail, which consisted of two letters, one in Hilda’s, and the other in Lancaster’s handwriting.

Hilda’s was a kindly little note, telling him how much he was missed, and how glad they would be of his return. Then followed some sisterly advice, as to the running of his house and the necessity of keeping a strict eye over whoever looked after him. There were also inquiries about his work, and plenty of encouragement and optimism; but there was something lacking. It seemed to Gabriel that she was straining after the conventional, because she feared either him or herself. All the way through he could feel that she was playing a game of hide and seek, one in which he never could contrive to catch her. There were occasional glimpses of a hand round the corner or a sparkle of eyes, but never the complete woman.

Lancaster’s was like the man: frank, intense, lovable.

“I have not dared to write to you before,” he wrote, “because, feeling the pain of our parting as I do, I feared lest my affections might betray me into what might read like foolishness when set down on paper. You know how it is, Gabriel, love-words without the voice are only words. And yet I do want to tell you once again, even at the risk of becoming tedious, how very much I love you. While you were near me the whole world seemed glad. I don’t know how to explain these sensations, but you are to me as a young knight who has attacked my Castle of

Despair, and set at liberty, and brought out into the day all the prisoners who had lain hidden and bound these many years. Truth to tell, this is just what you have done, so how should I fail to love you?" A little lower down he continued, "I wonder whether it is really true that all affection, even the purest, is ultimately selfish! It is a ridiculous confession for one man to make to the other, and yet I feel I must tell you—do you know, I am positively jealous of any new friends that you may make; I am frightened lest they should steal your heart from me. You, young as you are, have been my great deliverer; and what should I do if you were to be carried away bound? Every time you return to me after an absence I am filled with a morbid dread lest you may have changed with time, as all things change. For the first few hours together I watch your every action, lest in any way you should betray the secret that you do not love me as you did. Oh, these friendships! how they blend the bitter with the sweet, giving now the fulfilment of all desire, and now an agony of longing! How we shall look back to them in the years which are to come! with what strange regrets, with what sorrow of faces! Well, well, to have loved as you and I have loved is sufficient. Let us enjoy the perfect hour while it remains with us, gazing forward with blinded eyes." Later on, after recalling many joyous adventures which they had shared, he went on to say, "I dare say you will wonder, dear Gabriel, how it is that I now write all this, when I might have said it to your face. It is because of *the buried life*. I am like a big iceberg, and take a long while to unfreeze. My affections had stayed up at the North Pole so long that they were quite solid when you, my arctic explorer, came by and took me in tow for the South. Many an evening as we have sat together during the last few months, I have been willing, to the point of anguish, to open up to you my heart, but somehow my lips refused

to speak. I wonder whether this is a difficulty peculiar to me alone, or whether it is common to all mankind. Perhaps this was the great distinction between other men and Jesus, the one which the crowds who went to hear Him noticed, when they said, 'He spake as never man spake,' and which so startled the Samaritan woman when she reported, 'He told me all things that ever I did.' I should rather like to think that this was the case. If it were so, I think even I might learn to pray. Do you know, I have lately taken to doing one of those obvious things which so often turn out to be such a surprise: I have taken to reading my Bible, etc." So the letter went on until it came to the point where he spoke of his work. "You will remember what I told you about Hilda and my plans, when we went for that walk in Epping Forest? I am now more certain than ever that I have done the right thing. I did not worry you by telling you all that I was proposing, when you were with us, because I did not want to interrupt your work. There's no harm in doing so now, however. The numbers of the unemployed are greater than ever this winter, and the distress is something appalling. Down at the Turnpike we are in the heart of it, and see every day all the awful terror of their condition. Hilda and I feel that it is almost criminal to eat our own food, and to sleep in our own beds, when there are so many who are starving and homeless. How different a man I am from the one I was last year, when I was only too willing to bar and double-lock my doors that I might remember self only, and æsthetics! For this great moral change I have you to thank, and your love. Oh, how I despise that old self, with his little meannesses and his pride in his granite heart! How he would plume himself and strut, boasting that he had banished emotion, and was brave for any fate! yet, all the while, his heart was breaking. I was like a man who builds a tower in a market-place, and,

having made the walls so thick that no sound of moaning can escape, looks down from his high-up window, between the spasms in his pain, upon the busy crowd below, with a wizened, smiling face, calling upon the populace to witness how he does not suffer. I named myself a Stoic, poor fool that I was. That one word has wasted for me ten years of life.

“ ‘This is a queer kind of Christmas letter,’ you will say, and so it is. I have learnt what compassion means, and now can do nothing but talk about it. Hilda and I spend our days amongst fallen men and women. We eat our meals with them ; we handle them ; we give them the run of our house ; and at night, when the shop is closed, we go out to find others. So full is the house, that I have had to vacate my bed. I sleep better on the floor, with a gladder heart, than ever I did in my bed, when my heart was full of sores. I love these people. I shall never try to be respectable any more. Give me the bottom of the ladder ; I have no desire to climb into precipitous isolation. All my ambitions are gone, save this one, to love and cherish my unfortunate kind. I am even overcoming my loathing for vulgarity, and this, by doing what you did that morning with the clerk and the labourer—refusing to see their frailties. Hilda is with me heart and soul in all my work. She is more tender and lovable than I. When we are alone, I call her Christ’s little mother, because she has taken His poor into her breast.” Then, after some talk about Hilda and his love for her, the letter concluded : “This work is not for you ; at least, not yet. I regard it in the light of a penance for all my thirsty years ; nevertheless I find in the penance my greatest joy. You have nothing to atone for, so to you it is allowed to pass upon your way. Make great songs, Gabriel, for we poor outcasts need them. We want something good to whisper as we go about our tasks. Weave all that is true and noble,

however sad, into your singing; for men must be made to weep before they can become ripe for laughter. If you have learnt to pray, offer up a petition for poor old John. If not, then speak a kind word now and then when the wind is blowing this way, and perhaps he may catch the refrain."

Gabriel laid the letter down and brushed his hand across his eyes. "How good people are getting," he stammered; "I'm afraid I shall never be like that. And he will persist that it is all due to me. I, who tried to steal Hilda's love. It is now my turn to pattern myself by John."

A footstep came behind him, and a merry voice piped up, "Good-morning to you: a happy Christmas. How did you like my decorations?" Then, "Why, you've been crying!" In a trice, Mary was down on her knees at his side, holding his two wet hands in her own, her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, do tell me," she pleaded; "is it anything that I have done? Didn't you like the book?"

She was so evidently distressed, her whole face quivering, and her body trembling with pity, that Gabriel was at a loss to know what to make of her.

"No, no, little sister," he said, putting his arm around her. "There is nothing really the matter. I was crying because I was so happy."

"That is the best sort of crying," she said. "I have sometimes felt it, when I have been by myself in the woods, and a bird was singing."

"It is because a friend, away in the city of London, whom I love very dearly, has been singing that I am crying," Gabriel replied.

She drew back, and looked at him incredulously.

"But you—you couldn't hear any one singing all that way off, could you?"

He smiled at her with his eyes. "I couldn't hear their

voice. They wrote their song all down on paper and sent it to me."

"I wish I could do that," she sighed.

"So it was you," he questioned, changing the subject, "who came so early this morning and made the room bright with holly?"

She nodded. "And it was I who brought you the book. You see, I can't read, and I didn't know what to get you. I heard you say that you were fond of books, so I slipped down to the village last night and bought you that. Do you like it?"

"Oh, rather," said Gabriel, unwilling to disappoint her; "it's just the book I was wanting. I never have been able to learn one tenth part of what it contains, but now that I'm in the country, I shall have time to try all over again."

"I am glad that you like it," she said. "It's so difficult to know what people like. I must have read your thoughts somehow. If you really like it, I'll tell you what you can do—read it all aloud to me."

At this proposal, his countenance fell. He didn't want his deception to be found out. "Do you know, I don't think you would understand all that's said in there. It's too hard."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," she replied gaily. "You're clever, and will be able to make it simple, and explain. Shall we begin to-day?"

Gabriel looked puzzled, rummaging his brains for any excuse. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a present instead. I'll be your brother while I'm here."

"Oh, that'll be jolly. I've always longed for a brother," she cried. "And then, of course, in exchange, I shall be your sister."

"Of course," said Gabriel. "I always wanted a little sister, and have never had one. You shall be my Christmas present."

A sudden thought struck her, and she looked sad.

“What’s the matter now?” he asked. “Do you want to take back your gift?”

“I was wondering how long it would be before you went away. You’ll be here a long while, won’t you?”

“Oh, ever so long,” he cried; “for at least five months, and after that—we’ll see.”

She clasped her hands resignedly. “Then I shall forget to remember for the next five months. I shall tell myself that you have come to stop for always.” Then, illogically, “but, when you do go, I don’t know whatever I shall do.”

“Don’t let us think of that,” he said cheerily. “This is Christmas morning, and we’ve got to be happy. Come, now, what shall we do? Do you want to go to church?”

“I’ve never been in my life,” she said. “I don’t know the people, and I’d rather not, unless you’d like.”

“I’m not particular,” he replied.

“Well, then, the first thing to do, seeing we’ve become a family, is to have a meal together,” she said; “and, seeing that I’m your sister, it’s right that I should cook it. You’d better run over and tell Mrs. Crump that she’s not wanted to-day.”

“But how do I know that my sister can cook?” he asked.

“If you’re going to ask questions like that, you’ll very soon find that you haven’t got a new sister at all,” she answered with a laugh. “Now go and tell her.”

Mrs. Crump had gone to church, but Mr. Crump, who had lost most of his right leg in a poaching affray, was at home. He said that he would tell his wife. He was very anxious to detain Gabriel, and to engage him in conversation; also very anxious to know what had made him so eager to do without his dinner, in both of which objects he was foiled.

When Gabriel got back to the cottage, he found great preparations in progress. The breakfast had been cleared, the room swept and dusted, and on the table the gaunt anatomy of one of Mrs. Crump's turkeys, to whom more stuffing was being given at his death than he had ever received in his lifetime.

"Ah," said Gabriel, with mock pathos, walking up to the unfortunate bird, and laying his hand distressfully upon its haggard features, "we serve you as we serve ourselves. It has been left for strangers to discover your virtues, and to appreciate your parts—so little admired in your lifetime—now that you're dead. Alas, my featherless brother, our praise falls upon deaf ears, and your eyes can no longer see! How sad it is to reflect that we could not allow you to be present at your only triumph—while you were yet living—by eating you in your lifetime. It is too late now, like most kind thoughts—ah, vain regret! Would that we had thought of it earlier, for you are dead."

While Gabriel had been meandering on with his nonsense, Mary had paused in her kneading to listen. When he concluded, she said, "I suspect that you're only making fun; but, quite seriously, I always feel like that about dead animals. It seems so terrible to destroy a thing which you can never make again."

"I don't see how wishing that you'd eaten them in their lifetime can do them much good," said Gabriel, laughing at her simplicity.

"I wasn't talking about that part of what you said," she replied, tossing her long hair, "but about the cruelty of killing animals at all. Gabriel," she went on, looking up at him very earnestly, "I do hope you'll try and be serious with me. I know I'm a very odd girl, and very ignorant, and perhaps I don't appear to you to be very good, but that's on account of my loneliness and my

bringing up. I can't behave as a sister should, if you do nothing but play with me."

"You little stupid, how do you know how a sister ought to behave, when you've never had a brother?"

"I know very well, because I've thought it all out many times—when I've wished that I had one. Besides, when I was a little girl I used to pretend all kinds of things, and one of them was that I had a brother in the woods whom I went to visit all alone. Sometimes I would tell Mother the things that he said to me: and at first she would laugh; but afterwards she would cry."

"Why, what kind of things did you say that he told you?"

"All kinds of things. I remember his face, and all that he said, so distinctly, that I sometimes think he was really there after all. Whenever I go out alone after dark, I half expect to meet him. He had a name, and everything that a real live person ought to have."

"What was his name?" asked Gabriel, abandoning his bantering tone, and becoming interested.

"I used to call him Tony, and he called me Madge. He was ever so much taller than I am, and wore green clothes and long yellow hair. The first time we met was when I was a baby of about four, and had crawled away through the bracken over the hill at the back of the house, when Mother was out picking fruit in the garden. I was very happy at first, and watched the rabbits playing, and butterflies sailing to and fro, like painted ships. Then I grew tired of watching, and tried to run home; but I only got more and more lost in a green, strange land. I suppose I must have sat down to cry, for the next thing I remember is a boy dressed in green, with yellow hair and a smiling face, picking me up and kissing me, and telling me that I was his little sister. I didn't believe him at first, I fancy, until he began to tell me

wonderful stories about birds and beasts; and then, when he had made me laugh, I believed him. I must have stopped with him for ever so long, for it was long past tea-time when he carried me as far as the garden-gate and set me down, saying that his name was Tony and mine must be Madge, and that he would come again. Mother was so glad to get me back when I toddled in at the doorway, that she forgot to scold. But when she called me Mary, I corrected her, and said that my name was Madge, because the boy had told me so. Then the story came out. Mother thought that I was making it all up, and laughed, and, when I persisted, told me that it was naughty to tell fibs, and put me early to bed. For some time after that I kept my secret more to myself, and didn't tell her much. After our first meeting, I went with him again and again; sometimes all day, sometimes twice a day, until I grew older and saw him less; and then only saw him in the distance, looking out through the trees. The last time he came was the night Mother died. She was asleep, and I was sitting by her side sewing, when I felt some one looking at me in through the open door. As I was rising up softly, so as not to wake her, to see what he wanted, I saw quite distinctly the face of Tony. His eyes were red, as if he had been crying, but when I reached the door the garden was empty, and there was no one there."

"But that could only have been your imagination, and came of living so much alone."

"That's what Mother used to tell me, and what I have often thought myself, and yet—well, you see, Tony told me such strange things—things that I never could have thought for myself."

"What kind of things were they? You said just now that they made your mother cry."

"Mostly about myself, and good advice besides. He

used to tell me that when I grew up he would have to go away ; but that I must always remember what he had said to me, when we played together. One of the things which he was always saying was, 'The world is not good, Madge, you must be very careful ; the world is not good.' Then one day I asked what made him say that so often ; and he replied that most people, especially women, died when they were quite young, although they kept on walking about after their death, just like live people, and it was all because they had believed that the world was good. It was when I told Mother this, that she cried most."

"But the world is good, Mary. It is because I had found it to be so much better than I had supposed that you found me as you did this morning."

"Never mind, Gabriel, we shall both find out some day. Perhaps Tony was only a fairy tale ; at all events, I'm going to believe in you."

"But you said that you knew all about brothers. What do you know ?"

"If they are anything like Tony, they should be good, and strong, and unselfish. He was always this to me ; although I was sometimes very cross, I never heard him speak an angry word."

"He sets me a high example. I'm afraid I shan't be able to live up to it."

"Oh yes, you will," she said ; "your hands are just like Tony's, they are not the hands of a cruel man."

"You little minx," cried Gabriel, thinking he saw daylight, "I believe you've been making it all up ! Come, now, confess, there never was a boy in green, with yellow hair."

"Hush !" she said, with very evident consternation ; "if you talk like that, we may see him. I'm half afraid of you ; you're so like him."

“So that’s the secret, is it ; you recognized me from the first ?”

“We all dream our dreams,” she said very softly. And then, speaking louder, and making a low curtsy, “How can I answer all your questions ? You come from London, and I am only a poor country girl.”

“You are my little sister, whatever else you are,” cried Gabriel.

“While that is so,” she whispered, “nothing else matters.”

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN HEARTS ARE YOUNG

THE remainder of the Christmas Day passed happily away in this same innocent game of make-believe. If you pretend that a thing is so with sufficient persistence, you will awake some fine morning to discover that it has come to be. So with these two play-fellows, what had been commenced, by at least one of them, in a spirit of tender jest, soon came to be considered in the light of a reality. When the weather has been cold and the journey wearisome, the first fire one comes to does to warm the hands by. Mary and Gabriel had each felt life to be a little sad; here, by the merest accident, they had stumbled across the desolate Moorland of Circumstance by separate paths, up to the same lonely shelter, to find a fire already kindled, and comfort within.

What blame to them if they were loath to depart? "Pull down the blinds," they seemed to say the one to the other; "love is the unearned increment, and there are few who attain. Let us spend freely, while it is ours to enjoy. Love is a gift from the gods; to-morrow it may be gone. It is like to the wind—blowing where it listeth, and we hear the sound of its voice; but whence it cometh, and whither it goeth, we never can tell. This fire must some day perish and our comfort forsake us; let us be merry while we may." So, day in day out, they met and talked—when the weather was wet and dreary, at Folly

Acre or his cottage ; when the sun shone out again, in the woods and by the river. There was much gossip in the village and prodigious wagging of heads ; neither of which they appeared to perceive, or, if they did, to heed not at all.

Dan Meredith was the only one who had entrance to their intimacy. At first, even he was distressed. But when he saw how innocent and child-like was their affection, he ceased to grieve, and, at times, found occasion for envy. Sometimes, when taking a short cut through the forest, he would come upon them by surprise, walking hand-in-hand, simply and demurely. Then, he would attempt to pass by, with his accustomed salutation, "Peace be unto you, my children." At other times he would discover them plunging deeper into the greenwood, Gabriel holding back the branches that she might enter. "There is nothing of frenzy in their love," he would assure himself, "it is akin to that of Christ for his sisters. The Lord goes with them."

But there were occasions when they would see him first, and run toward him, and carry him away captive to some secret covert ; and there, sitting down among the fern or upon a fallen log, encourage him to tell them of his past, and of the belief which he had. They, in return, would relate the mysteries they had witnessed in the forest : the bird's nest which they had visited, and the burial mounds they had discovered. To the birds they would take presents of grain, and on the graves of the ancient dead strew flowers. For the latter action Mary would explain the reason by saying, "Poor dead people, they have never had any one to care for them. They were Britons, and have been dead for—how many years did you say, Gabriel ?" with an inquiring glance—"for more than two thousand years, Dan, and we thought that they must be very lonely ; so we brought them flowers."

"Their souls are with the Lord," Meredith would expostulate.

"We are neither of us sure of that ; and besides, the Lord was not born when they fell fighting, Gabriel says. So we bring them flowers."

After which Meredith would be silent, the world having begun at Bethlehem for him.

"I wonder whether any one will give us flowers, when we have been dead so long?" she would question shyly.

"We, at least, shall be with the Lord," Meredith would reply exultantly.

"Yes, but what about these poor people? If they are not there, I should not be happy," she would say.

Then the old man would shake his head uncomprehendingly, and kiss her hand, saying, "The Lord is good." Rising, they would go away.

Even to his dull eyes, they were both changed. By some mystic alchemy of the soul they had both become etherealized. All of the peasant had disappeared from Mary; the sweet rusticity of her nature alone remained. Gabriel also was different ; he had become purged of the cynic and contentious townsman—had risen above the world of strife.

When Meredith was perplexed by a phenomenon which he could not explain, it was his habit to read deliberately through the Gospels from Matthew to John, and continue so doing, until some passage of Scripture gave him the solution. This expedient he reverted to at the present juncture. He had not read far before he stumbled on the words, "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

"Little children!" he thought. "Most certainly that is what they have become. They have been converted into little children ; but have they been converted into Christ?"

He went to them, and asked them, and guarded over them, and prayed for them. "This is only the beginning of the change," he would argue. "The best is yet to come. They have entered the Kingdom ; they have yet to meet the Christ."

So, through the long nights, having returned weary from preachings at cross-roads or in a neighbouring village, he would pray through the darkness with tears in his eyes that these "dear lambs," as he chose to call them, might find the seeking Shepherd. At the breaking of the day, he would hurry to them, to watch with anxious eyes whether his petition had yet been granted.

As to the views which *the children* held of themselves, they were so misty and blurred that they could hardly be said to exist. In the completeness of their happiness they simply drifted, content with the moment and its burthen of pleasure ; never thinking ; never reflecting ; secure in the assurance that they were as they were.

Nevertheless, with a woman, affection of whatever kind can scarce be other than marital. This is the sacred purpose of her living—to bring forth heirs unto God. She woos her child, her brother, her girl-friend, and her lover with a like subconscious intent ; only there is a difference in degree of passion. All her loving is prompted by the ill-recognized voice of the thing within her, crying out both day and night that it may find expression, and be born.

With a man it is otherwise. He can love without peril to himself, pass on and love again. Directly a woman's heart quivers within her, she is in danger of salvation or loss.

These truths remain for the watching eye to perceive. Men rarely watch their emotions at work, unless they be saints or time-servers. A woman never—she acts. There was no one of sufficient wisdom near by to warn these two

that Launcelot and Guinevere is a true story. So they drifted on, unaware of their danger.

Tragedies come stealthily and in the night ; the episodes of young love openly and in broad day. For Mary and Gabriel it was as yet early morning, and neither realized their risk. Their eyes were for the time blind to the accusing faces of the village ; their ears deaf to the world-wise tauntings of spite. The purity of their own intentions made the whole earth clean and native to them.

Looking back upon their doings years after, had it been possible, they might truthfully have said—

“For a day and a night Love sang to us, played with us,
 Folded us round from the dark and the light ;
 And our hearts were fulfilled with the music he made with us,
 Made with our hearts and our lips while he stayed with us,
 Stayed in mid-passage his pinions from flight
 For a day and a night.”

Only, as so often happens, when the season for such singing came, there were no two voices left to sing. For the one that remained, the desire for song was over-past.

The single excuse that can be made is that their love was innocent, and that they did not know. All this while, Gabriel's book was galloping on apace. The Poet's forecast, that peace and the country would produce in him song, had been verified in this unexpected way. Every ramble and intimate conversation hastened its completion ; for the inspiration which it contained owned a dual authorship. Like gusts of wind on an untroubled sea, each breath left its impress and was duly recorded in some little or large commotion of sound. The results attained far surpassed his most sanguine hope. He instinctively grew into a quiet confidence of his purpose. The distresses and regrets, registered at the Turnpike, gradually working toward this abundant calm, gave to his cycle of singing a strength which could not fail to comfort such chance

derelicts as should venture upon his page—a comfort which, he told himself, would easily atone for the vicarious suffering which the book's production had imposed.

Never did poet labour amid kinder surroundings than he. Every most trivial incident of the day contributed to his creations. Mary, with her naïve and pertinent remarks, was for ever throwing his mind back to a lost simplicity, and kindling his imagination to forgotten purities of twilight days.

While yet retaining the maturity of his genius, he had become as one of earth's earliest children, not distinguishing between good and evil—this, for the reason that he remembered only the good.

For the time, he was as one who sleeps and dreams in his sleep, haunted by phantoms of the things that were—memories which traversed his dream-life discordantly, causing him to rouse and, opening his eyes, to gaze round upon the well-known room, but not for long, and then, having found the familiar unsubstantial, only to hurry back with quickened feet to the delicate land of his acclaiming shadows.

The villagers, on account of the distant intangibility of his look, nicknamed him "The Man in the Mist." Straight ahead he walked, gazing neither to left nor right; a dream-man in a dream-world, and she following.

How far she really followed, and how much he attributed to her by the glamour of his presence, it is unsafe to say. Yet, remembering the mystery of her childhood, its solitude, together with her own early imaginative wanderings with the green boy of the flaxen hair, it is only just to suppose that they walked with an equal strength, side by side.

The waking moments of this strange life came to him with the advent of letters from his old companions, telling him of doings at the Turnpike. "Life is a crusade, life is a crusade," Lancaster would continually insist. To which

Gabriel would reply, "And for me it is one long dream." Having read their messages and dispatched his answers, he would lapse with a happy sigh into the interrupted vision, and, reassuming his pen, scramble off fresh verses, explore new emotions, and wander along the familiar by-ways, accompanied by the same dear companion.

Their method of daily living was irregular and impulsive in the extreme. Early in the morning they would come together, clinging the one to the other with that tenacity of trust which a young child displays for its mother—the probable outcome of fear of sudden bereavement. The path between the tall trees which connected his cottage with Folly Acre was well worn by their willing feet. They seemed to outvie in devotion as to who should be first to announce the sunrise, so that at times they would happen half-way in the shadow of the dawn. Each day was too short for their pleasures; they were passionate to exhaust every hour of its last cup of joy. The good-bye at evening was of lengthy process, undertaken gradually, with many journeys and frequent repetitions. There were waitings outside in the dusk, on Gabriel's part, till her light had been extinguished, and the farm was utterly dark. Counter watchings before sunrise, on Mary's, for the opening of his window, which heralded for her the breaking of new day. Second by second the spring was drawing nearer, the magic of his breath was in the air. Birds were returning by twos and twos back to the last year's nests. Buds were bursting in the tree-tops. Life was exulting in rapid strength throughout the greenwood. Their hearts were possessed by the madness of his laughter. Theirs was a pagan world; too full of merriment to be Christian; with too little of grief to last for long. No thought of parting marred the pageant of their day; only at evening did the melancholy of boding foreshadow, when hands were parted and they had said "Good-night."

Happy as children in the first wonder of created things, they launched forward in search of newer discoveries, with no sadness of whence and whither.

Columbus, in sight of the New World, was not more glad than they. Theirs was a new world, as indeed is that of every babe who turns his new eyes upon our timeworn lands. The world has been here all the while ; it is the new eyes which make it new.

For all his delight, there was no trace of sex in Gabriel's love. She was a heart and a soul to him ; nothing less. The inspirer of his ideals ; sharer in his thoughts ; interpreter and awakener of his better nature. He cherished her without regard to her womanhood, as he might have done a religion, a philosophy, or another man ; as the thing which had made known himself to himself, and called forth his god-head.

For a woman, such refinements of psychologic processes are impossible. Unaware of it herself, at the back of all display, she loved him only as a man, and panted for his coming. It required the crisis to reveal to her this truth. So far, she mimicked his attitudes, as do all lovers the preferences and willings of those they love. The crisis was not yet.

Meekness had become the paramount quality in her nature. While he was writing, she was content to sit quietly sewing in a room hushed and silent, save for the click of her needle and the peck of his rapid pen. The task complete, she would listen attentively to the reading of his production, often startling him by the aptness of her criticisms and suggestions.

"Where did you get your knowledge ?" he would ask in amaze, remembering her ignorance of books, and inability to read or write.

"Is that knowledge ?" she would ask surprisedly. "Mamma was very clever and used to talk with me, which

may have helped. Then, I have had words and tunes coming in my head ever since I was quite little. You see," she would say with a smile, "there was no one to give me songs to sing, so I had to make them for myself. The boy in green taught me a few."

Any mention of the boy in green rather aggravated Gabriel; mystified him. Here was something which he could not understand.

The whole desire of flaming friendship is to know, and to know till naught is left to know; till the heart of the one you love lies beating in the hollow of your own two hands, more completely yours than your own. While the boy in green dwelt behind closed doors, with a stolen portion of that knowledge, Gabriel was not satisfied.

He would reason with her. "That was all an hallucination."

"Perhaps," she would answer.

"But don't you understand that people who pass for sane never see such things?"

"And do they see the sights that we are seeing?" she would ask. And there he ceased to follow, and his reasonings broke down.

Sometimes they would revert to their first meeting.

"How altered you are from that first night," he would say.

"That was not me," she would answer. "It was a wild, wilful, lonely girl, something like me, but not me. I began with you."

"And what if I should go away? who would you be then?" he would ask.

"I should cease to be," she would answer. "This self came into existence when you came. I am you."

Such sayings filled him with a momentary fear, which he would soon dispel by saying, "They are only words;" and turn again from the future to his present felicity.

Conversations of such a nature only occurred when they had become partially conventionalized by dwelling within four surrounding walls. Once in the open, they were natural again—natural or unnatural as the case may be—natural to themselves, unnatural to the ruling world.

The genius of the country flooded them—the song of the untamed ; the perfumed breath of the hastening spring ; the pathetic memory of the haunted past.

On the crown of the hill behind Folly Acre stood a British encampment ; one of the most perfect of its kind ; said to have been fashioned by Caractacus, in his last great stand against the Roman Eagles. In times gone by the road from Monbridge to Siluria had crossed the Whither at this point ; the encampment had guarded the passage of the ford.

Hither it was the custom of these two to come for ultimate quietude ; to watch the sunset trail through hushed valleys, gleaning his purples and his golds ; beckoning fires from the river-depths ; whispering timid greys from beneath tall trees ; gathering them all home westward, till his molten image splashed hissing and drenched, drowned in the distant sea.

There was little said upon such occasions ; the hour was too solemn, remindful of all that is transient and fleeting.

The approach to the camp led up through a sloping pasture, on through a narrow copse ; out on to a numb, dead moorland, where red deer grazed and hawks shot up, circling and battering against a brazen sky.

The fortification itself, with its many gates and outer walls, its elaborate and laborious preparations against a vanished foe, bore grim and significant testimony to the fruitlessness of resistance against the cruelest of all enemies—the noiseless hosts of Time.

“And they have all passed,” she would say, as if in answer to a spoken thought.

“And thus we also shall pass,” he would reply.

This was all. While they yet spoke the sun sank, the wind sprang up and moaned across the broken battlements.

Once, when clambering down on the farther side, they came upon the house where Meredith lived. They had stayed overlong upon the headland, and it was getting late. A light still burned, showing that he was yet awake.

Stealing stealthily to the window, Gabriel looked in before knocking. They never knew what vagrant company he might keep, or how he might occupy his time.

Kneeling before the table, with the lamp in front, and an open book before his eyes, his lips moving in a low monotone, the man wept as he read, pausing now and again to pray.

“Come away,” said Gabriel, “he will not want us to-night.”

They turned to go. As they did so, her foot caught against a pot of ferns, standing outside the door, which rolled over with a clatter and brought Meredith to his feet. Looking out through the panes he called to them to stop, and brought them into his room.

“I have been thinking of you, my children,” he said, “and praying that you might come.” He waited for them to speak, and then continued tremblingly, “Love is unsafe without religion . . . God made us frail.”

Mary, leaning with her head against Gabriel’s shoulder, seemed not to understand the meaning of what was said. Gabriel flushed angrily.

“You shall not hear what he says,” he cried, and half-dragged, half-carried her towards the door.

Meredith hobbled after them as fast as his lameness would permit. “Oh, I have prayed for you so often. Don’t be angry with me,” he pleaded.

“You have defiled your lips,” Gabriel cried, “and vilified our love! Leave us!”

“Poor, dear Dan, what has he done?” asked Mary, breaking away and throwing her arms around the old man’s neck.

“Go away with him,” said Meredith brokenly. “I have misjudged you both.”

She was loath to leave. Long after their footsteps had ceased to sound, Meredith stood at his gate thinking—thinking.

CHAPTER XX

A PENITENT APOSTLE

IF we could only be privileged to play audience to our own clowning, be psychologically hoisted off the stage to witness ourselves transacting folly, we should be saved from much anger for others ; blessed with more anger for ourselves ; and acquire, perhaps, just sufficient of humour to make even such anger compassionate.

As they walked homeward through forest and field to Folly Acre, they were unusually silent. The first jarring note had been struck since Gabriel's coming ; it had brought to a halt the music of their days, like a clumsy discord in a rhapsody of song.

"Our lives are too beautiful—too short for anger," she said at last.

"Are they too short for the jealousy of love ?" he answered petulantly. Already he was becoming aware of his misdoing, inclined to be sorry, and therefore annoyed that the first acknowledgment of his wrong as wrong should have come from one he loved—especially from her.

"Love is too large for jealousy, when it is strong. It looks beyond life," she said. "Every day I grow more convinced of this—I think this is really what Dan means by religion. Anger is so small a passion for you and me—it dies with death."

"I was angry for your sake, dear."

"And Dan offensive for both our sakes," she laughed.

"I am grieved with him for having made me angry rather than for anything else, just now," he said; "I wish he had allowed this day to pass like all the other days."

"We have to-morrow in which to forget," she whispered. "Shall one so small discomfort rob us of our to-morrow's pleasure?"

"No, we will forget," he answered. But it was over-easily spoken.

After he had parted with her at her door, he wandered slowly back to his solitary cottage, and sat down by the window in the darkness to brood.

"Meredith was right in his way," he said, "and I am a fool for my pains. How could any one understand us, saving ourselves?"

At the back of his mind the old dread of his infant days was rising up—the fear lest his adversary should die unforgiven.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," his mother had repeated to him, when he had given way to passion. He could recall the horror with which as a child he had lain awake all night combating his pride, longing for the morning to dawn, that he might speak the word of peace. During these last weeks he had become again a child; the horrid question, "What if he should die in the night?" beat on his brain with the maddening regularity of a loud-ticking clock. He grew beside himself with contrition.

Should he go down to Dan's and tell him that he was sorry? He pulled out his watch, and, seeing that the hour was already late, concluded that it would be of little good. But how should he await the morning? "It may be too late," came the prompting voice; "why don't you go?"

Foolish as the position might be, Gabriel was not so

possessed by folly that he had lost all sense of what was commonplace. He determined to sit the mood out.

Presently he heard the raised latch of his gate, and a footstep traversing the garden path. A long, grotesque shadow fell athwart the grass, and a tapping sounded on the door. He opened his window and looked out. There, in the darkness, he espied the familiar figure of Meredith, supported by his stick, with hand raised in act to knock.

“Is that you, Dan?” he whispered.

“Yes, lad, it’s me,” came back.

He opened the door wide, and drew his penitent in.

“I’m sorry, Gabriel, for what I said. I couldn’t sleep for thinking about it, so I just came round to tell you I was sorry.” His voice was quivering.

“Don’t say that ; it is I who should apologize ; I was to blame,” cried Gabriel. “I was a beast to say what I did. It is I who am sorry.”

Meredith stretched out his hand through the darkness toward the other’s face, and touched it gently. “I want to speak to you. That’s what I came for. I misjudged you. I want to tell you why.”

The room was chill. Having kindled a lamp and brought together logs, they set a fire blazing. All enmity was at an end.

Meredith had not been seen to smoke since his return to Wildwood. Now, to make things comfortable, he produced a battered briar from his pocket, drew his face into the shadow, and began.

“I spoke as I did because I went wrong about your age, through trusting over-much in myself. When a man has fallen into a hole, he ought to warn his friend. You see me to-day, hobbling round with my lame leg to preach the Word anywhere, to anybody. What does that mean?”

"I don't know. Except that you're good," answered Gabriel.

"Not that. It means that I once was bad. It means that I'm hurrying all that I ought to have done in the fulness of my strength into the fag-end of my life. When you see a man so eager as I am to rescue other men's souls, be sure of it he's sorry for something—has had his own saved first."

"You were not always what you are now?" asked Gabriel.

"Far from it."

"Tell me," he said.

"I was born and bred in Wildwood," Meredith commenced, settling himself down, as a man does who has a long night before him and much to relate. "Mary's grandparents, the Devons, were then living up at Folly Acre, and many other old folk were here who are either dead or gone now.

"My father was one of the lesser gentry of the countryside, the son of a Monbridge lawyer, and had served in the army on the west coast of Africa.

"He was a queer combination of a man; dark, gloomy, hard-drinking, blasphemous, yet always tender-hearted towards Mother and us children. He never mentioned his early exploits. Mother told us just sufficient to account to us for his weaknesses, and to make him grand in our eyes. It appears that he ran away from home, when little more than a boy, and joined the military; after which his family would have nothing to do with him, considering that he had disgraced his name. One day, years later, it came to their notice that through several acts of the most reckless daring he had been raised from the ranks and had received his captaincy. They communicated with him in Africa, and a reconciliation by letter resulted. It now became his great desire to return to England and meet his

people face to face. Before taking his furlough, he had another year of service to put in. That last year proved fatal. A native rising took place which threatened to spread to dangerous proportions. The Governor, a gouty old coward, whose place it was to issue orders, feared for his personal safety, and fled to a fort on the coast, giving out that he was fever-stricken and incapable of command. Naturally, the next highest official, my father, should have filled his post. But he, either because he knew himself to be better fitted for the receiving than the giving of orders, or because he was sufficiently generous to recognize the superior man, singled out a young civil servant of the colony, named Cartwright, and asked him to undertake the defence. He and my father worked magnificently together and saved the situation.

“When everything had quieted, the Governor, coming out from his retirement, accused Cartwright of usurping authority, and therefore of insubordination ; all of which was technically correct. He finished up by sending home to the Foreign Office a most damaging letter, advising Cartwright’s removal from the service as being a dangerous man. My father alone had it in his hands to save him ; this, at his own expense, by stating facts, and therefore revealing his own incompetence to cope single-handed with an emergency—which meant his ruin.”

“What did he do ?” asked Gabriel.

“He didn’t consider two minutes. He saved Cartwright, and, as a consequence, was himself recalled in disgrace. His family again dropped him. He retired here to Wildwood. He had been disappointed in himself and his superiors ; took black views ; gave himself up to drink and irreligion. All of which had a bad influence over us children.”

“I would allow a man who could be guilty of one such

virtue any quantity of vice, before I condemned," Gabriel broke in.

"I only tell you this about my father as some sort of an explanation of what is to follow. I hold with you that, if there ever was a brave man, it was he. Nevertheless, his power over us, his children, was none of the best. Mother did what she could to direct and keep us straight, which wasn't much, when we had a continual example of confused living daily before our eyes. We all grew up more or less wild—I especially. From drinking round at taverns I took to gambling and poaching. All my views became loose and flabby. I was young and handsome, and therefore rather admired than otherwise by the rustics for my doings. Admiration helped me to lay doubts and misgivings to rest. I abandoned my own and my mother's convictions about myself for the opinion of others—the most rapid of all roads to ruin.

"Presently I fell in love with a neighbouring farmer's daughter, which for the time changed me. I gave up drink, and pulled straight for her sake. The village was disappointed in me—their Don Juan had turned saint. My father was indifferent, but Mother radiant.

"Dora's mother and father—for that was the girl's name—disapproved of our love affair very strongly. They were sturdy Methodists of the old type, believers in predestination, who held me for a son of Belial, and sincerely thought that I was fore-ordained to hell fire. This being so, they forbade our match. We were driven to secret meetings in the woods and dells, where we could court one another unobserved. Secrecy bred deceit. I built a little arbour of twigs and rushes in a lonely place, and here we spent our summer days.

"Despite my change in conduct, there cannot have been any vital change of heart. When I lived riotously it had been through no fondness for vice, but from sheer excess

of animal spirits. What I afterwards called my love, I now believe to have had no loftier beginning.

“We called ourselves romantic; prided ourselves that our way of courting was new. In reality our romance was very ancient—only the game of hide and seek with temptation, at which so many have played. She was young and beautiful, but her principles were only inherited—not thought out. When I praised her, the barriers of restraint broke down. When I argued with her she forgot her moral standards. Of these she was already tired on account of their severity.

“Both of us had been well educated (we prided ourselves on it), and had a love of books. I was to her a kind of Robbie Burns; so we read poetry together in our arbour all through the long summer evenings—poetry of the more perilous kind, and tampered with our modesty. All this came about because no God stood between us. For this reason I said to you, ‘Love without religion is unsafe; God made us frail.’

“What I have so far told you, when translated into cold words, must sound brutal. It was not so at that time for us. As I have said, it possessed the glamour of romance—romance, which is the conscious power to do wrong.”

Meredith paused, his face ashy grey. Leaning forward, and lowering his voice, he said, “I don’t know what your parentage has been, laddie, but believe me, it is a thing to be reckoned with, and guarded against. ‘I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.’ I forgot that. I forgot the ferocity of the long years of my father’s hating—and the jealousy of the Lord—and that my father’s hatred ran in my veins. And if a man is at war with his God, where shall he seek for peace? I tried to find peace in love. I found a truce, but no peace.”

“But you have found peace?” questioned Gabriel. Not that he felt an answer necessary, but because he found the long silence into which Meredith had fallen unbearable.

“Yes,” replied Meredith, “but it came over-late. I am now fighting for the Lord.” Pulling himself together with an effort, he continued, “It fell out in the usual way. We neither of us meant any harm, but, when she was ruined, I grew frightened, and she hated me. Oh, Gabriel, may God spare you the pain of seeing hatred look out upon you from the windows of love! She dared not tell her people; they would have stoned her. From me, who was willing to help her, she would have nothing. All the virtue which I had not suspected in her came to the front in the imminence of her disgrace. She was changed into a woman, better than the one whom I had known, thinking and fending for herself.

“One morning the news spread over the country that she had disappeared. The hue and cry were raised, but no trace of her was found, save that she had walked through the night the six miles to Siluria, and taken train for London.

“Now all fingers pointed at me. Not that I cared; the bitterness of my own remorse was too terrible. The hatred of the Lord was upon me, though I did not know it by such a name. I could not rest. Every horrible imagining came to me by night and by day. I saw her dead. I saw her eyes fixed upon me with loathing and despair. I saw her wandering a city’s streets, destitute and famished.

“Every glade and wood-path was remindful of her, so that it became impossible for me to rest.

“Her parents said nothing. They went about their tasks as though no tragedy had happened. Nevertheless, the spring had relaxed in their lives; they dwindled, and, in two years, I heard that they were dead of shame and

suspense. I had killed them. I knew that I should never do any good by stopping near by the place where I had done the deed, so I fled to Canada. Everywhere I went the hatred of the Lord followed me; I prospered at nothing.

“One winter I starved in Montreal, another in Ottawa. I got to be known as a ‘bum,’ a rolling stone which accumulates only new vices.

“I worked on railroads; went logging in British Columbia; drifted on from job to job, despising and despised; sank lower and lower; drinking harder and harder; always with the torturing memory of my early wrong-doing confronting my eyes. My first hope in going abroad had been to make sufficient money to enable me to return and find out Dora, in order that I might do something to set her right. The more I remembered, the more my memory dragged me down.

“I grew old and crippled, broken before my time by the cruel winters and the harsh work, till all ambition went out from me. I became content to drag on in a maudlin way, deprived of hope of any sort. One day, when my luck was at its lowest ebb, a fellow named Nevin, whom I had known, came to me and said, ‘Here, you bum, do you want to earn five dollars a month honestly?’

“He wouldn’t have dared to offer such money to any but the lowest dregs. Both the amount and his way of offering were an insult. It was obvious that he wanted something cheap. I cringed, for I was drink-sodden and had hardly any clothes to my back—this, with a North-West winter coming on. I told him that I did.

“‘D’you suppose that you can keep sober enough to take care of my cattle and guard my farm for a six month?’ he asked. I answered that I’d try.

“‘Can you handle a gun and keep the thieving Indians away?’ he went on.

"I bluffed it out, and said that I'd been a marksman in my day.

" 'Well, then,' said he, 'you can start out to-morrow.'

"Then, with a sneer which made me long to choke him, looking back over his shoulder as he passed through the door, 'I don't suppose you've got much to pack.'"

"And did you go?" asked Gabriel.

"Go, laddie! You bet I did. It meant food and shelter for the winter to me."

"What kind of a place was it?"

"A pioneer farm, way out on the prairie, with never a man in sight. Nevin had grown out of his farming and had become a railroad contractor; but he still kept his stock running, and daren't leave the cattle to fend for themselves through the winter, so he put me in to take care of them.

"Soon after I arrived, the snow came down and blanketed up everything. Never before nor since have I been so much alone. My eyes ached with the monotony; when I closed them for relief the very darkness looked white.

"While the drink which I had brought with me lasted, I got along tolerably well—could get drunk and forget. When I discovered that this was giving out, and realized that it was impossible to get any more till the spring, I was filled with despair. I tried to harden myself to brazen it out; but it was no good. When I looked out from the window morning, noon, and night, and saw nothing but that brutal glare of paleness girding me in on every side, I wept as if my heart must break.

"I numbered every day as it dragged by; it meant one less till I should see the face of a living man. Every night I tried to sleep, dreading the coming of new day. I should have shouted with joy had the Indian cattle-lifters come; but not one came nigh nor by. At last, only one bottle of whisky remained. Whisky was my god,

you understand ; it stood between me and memory, and I treasured it as good women do their chastity.

“ Sometimes my temptation would get beyond me, so that I would crawl on hands and knees, like a beast, against my own desire, across the shack to draw the cork and smell the stuff for which I had bartered my soul away.

“ Day in, day out, surrounded by the great white snow, this struggle went on with weepings, temptations, remorse, and fear, till one night, as I sat there alone, with a blizzard shaking every timber, I heard the pounding of heavy hoofs around the house.

“ I tried to persuade myself that the cattle had broken loose ; but when I opened the door and looked out, there was nothing, save only the roar of the wind and the patter of falling snow. I went in and sat down.

“ No sooner had I done so than the pounding gallop began again. Round and round it went, till I feared to look out, dreading what I might see.

“ There is a belief on the prairie that the Death Horse comes at dead of night, in the depth of winter, to a house where one of the inmates is to die. No one has ever seen it, but, in the morning, its trappings are found in the snow ; they are like to the footprints of no living animal.

“ In a frenzy of terror I crept to my last bottle, and finished it neat, almost at a gasp.

“ In the morning I awoke late, feeling sick and wretched. The fire had died out in the night, and the room was icy cold. Gradually the remembrance of what had happened came back to me. I tried to laugh it away ; but when I saw that all the whisky was gone, I began to be afraid. Nothing now stood between me and my fright.

“ I looked across the level of the prairie ; it was pallid as the face of the dead. Here and there, where the wind puffed and blew, grey, evil figures sprang up and slowly

danced, their faces turned with mocking my way, then disappeared.

"I went outside. All around my shack were the prints of feet, but no trail to mark how they came or went."

"There must have been some explanation. Cattle loose—or something," murmured Gabriel.

"No. In the first place, I could have followed their trail; there was none. In the second, the prints were cloven and clawed, something between the mark of a cow and of a monstrous talon—made by the feet of no known animal. To a man at home, surrounded by neighbours, all this must sound ridiculous; but men who have spent a winter on the prairie, out of reach of human aid, with the interminable levels of the snow encamped on every side, have seen these things—and they know."

"You mean that loneliness gets on their nerves, as it did on yours," said Gabriel. "Nevertheless, go on."

"Through three more days I watched for the last glimmering of daylight, and waited with horror for the coming of dark. Each night the galloping arrived and the hoofs pounded, till I grew wild with terror, hemmed in on every side, having no way of escape. My old sins rose up before my eyes, especially that of my early wrongdoing. I knew myself for foul, and unprepared to die. At a loss what to do, I waited in a maddening silence for the end.

"On the fourth night I sat crouched before my fire, face in hands, when the galloping came again. I didn't stir; couldn't speak; simply waited for a hand to strike. In some vague way it came to me how there was power in the sign of the Cross.

"I slipped upon my knees, crossing my arms, and prayed, 'O Lord, I am a sinful man; spare me for just this once that I may glorify Thy name.'

"In an instant the commotion ceased, great silence fell

upon my heart, a quivering compassion filled the room. When the new day dawned, it found me weeping and smiling out my confession, and at peace. I went to the door and looked out, feeling a tideless river of happiness wash through my soul. There, upon the untrodden snow, instead of the mark of hoofs, the sun shone upon the hollow wherein a large cross had lain—large enough to bear up a man.”

“Did you ever hear it again?” Gabriel whispered.

“Never. The hatred of the Lord had passed from me with that night. I had given myself to Him, and become a clean man.”

“And you really believe that all this happened?”

“As assuredly as did Hezekiah; the Lord turned back for me the shadow upon the dial ten degrees, that I might live to do His work. There is still more to tell. For the remainder of that winter I lived in His confidence, and was not alone. Everything within me was changed, the new heart had begun.

“One morning, in early spring, soon after the thaw had set in, Nevin rode up. He found no longer in possession the ‘bum’ whom he had sent out, but a consecrated man.

“Nevin was a Scotchman, and therefore, beneath all external roughnesses, a God-fearer at heart. When he saw me, he wanted to know what had happened. I told him. He swore softly and said, ‘Well, I’m damned if that wasn’t the right hand of the Lord; and I’ll be His left hand to you.’

“He took me up, and gave me my chance. He was growing into a big man through his railroad transactions, for at that time every line was pushing hurriedly West. I worked under him, and made more in one summer than I had handled all my life. All the time I was yearning to get back to Wildwood. I wanted to do my good deeds in the village where I’d done my bad. Nevin wanted me to

go into partnership with him, and offered me equal profits, though he had all the capital. He said that I had brought him luck, which was a shallow way of expressing something deeper. I couldn't and dared not stay. After three years I pulled up stakes and sailed for home. Here I am, crippled and maimed, hobbling around and trying to do the Lord's work."

"But why did you come to Wildwood of all places?" asked Gabriel. "Couldn't you have done much better for Him elsewhere?"

"Maybe, laddie; but, when the finger of the Lord points, you have to obey."

"So that is why you go preaching and helping the tramps along the road?"

"That is why. I have no choice. I'm instructed by One who is mightier than I. And the reason why I have told you all this is to warn you against trusting over-much in yourself. God made us frail, that we might feel forced to throw ourselves on Him. We're all over-strong, until we have fallen. Now do you forgive me?"

"I had done that already, Dan. I'm glad you told me; it makes me love you better."

"It isn't me that I want you to love, laddie, it's the Lord Jesus Christ." Meredith came over through the grey light and stood looking into his face.

"You have almost persuaded me, Dan; I love Him now. I shall love Him better some day and, perhaps, believe in Him."

"Not some day, but now," said Meredith, casting out his hands.

"You have almost persuaded me," Gabriel reiterated.

The night had worn away, the sun was already smiting the panes, when their conversation came to an end.

Sitting in their chairs, on either side of the smouldering hearth, they dozed.

A sudden thought occurred to Gabriel. Rousing himself, he asked in a sleepy voice, "But what of her, Dan? Did you discover her?"

There was no answer. Meredith had tottered to sleep, his head fallen forward upon his broad chest. Gabriel was not slow to follow.

CHAPTER XXI

HE SOUGHT OUT HIS SOUL

THEY never referred to that evening again. Gabriel, because he was ashamed of his share in it; Mary, because she was willing to forget; Meredith, because there were some questions concerning his narration which he was anxious to postpone. The incident had accomplished two things; the one good, the other in some ways bad. It had drawn Gabriel nearer to Meredith, and shown him that he was a man to be loved and trusted. He tended, with ever-increasing frequency, to slip down through the woods to the cottage by the high-road to converse with this unsalaried evangelist, sometimes on religion, sometimes on books, and at times to ask his advice. Meredith was a good influence over Gabriel. He was wholesome and sincere, and, best of all, a ship which had found its rudder; a man who had manfully sought out his soul, and discovered it not all evil. The quality which had been most conspicuously lacking in Gabriel's earlier companions had been a sturdy sincerity based on belief. Meredith was the first man, whom he had met at close range, who possessed a thought so profound that it was worth dying for. Not that Lancaster and Hilda were not sincere, but theirs was a desperate expedient for doubt rather than the loving offspring of a loyalty. At Oxford he had numbered among his friends and acquaintance a score of men who had investigated more deeply, in a scholastic

way, the old and threadbare problems of metaphysics ; but never before had he come into contact with any who had lived his solution with his life. Here at last, at the "Tramps' House of Rest," he began to realize a belief which was tangible, that one might grip and feel the fingers close upon—not the froth of a theory. So, setting aside his inherent proneness to dogmatism and disdain, he became willing to learn. Hour by hour he would stand, a silent spectator, watching Meredith's skill in binding up maimed hearts of the highway, marvelling the while. As the evenings lengthened out he would accompany him to the cross-roads where he preached, witnessing the effect of the Word upon peasant listeners, himself impressed, but not persuaded. Gradually he came to look upon this self-imposed task as a duty, and rarely missed an occasion. Meredith was so lame, and took such long journeys, that after the exhaustion of preaching, he could scarce muster strength to crawl back home. By the support of Gabriel's strong arm the return was made easier.

"I can't make out how you managed it before by yourself," Gabriel once said to him.

"Oh, easily enough, laddie," Meredith had cheerfully replied ; "when I couldn't stumble another yard I just crept under a hedge like my Master. 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests ;' you know the passage. What was good enough for Jesus is good enough for me."

On these lengthy excursions Gabriel had opportunity to get at the genuine inwardness of the man, and was not once disappointed. Unknown to himself he had commenced to set up a composite ideal, made up of Meredith and Lancaster, for his copying ; an ideal whose watchword was selflessness. The copying was an undertaking for the future ; at present he was learning to copy. On the other hand, the recollection of the night of Dan's confession was in some ways bad, in so far as it made Gabriel intro-

spective, conscious of his love for Mary, and sensitive of misconstruction. Until that occasion all their interchange had possessed the sweet indiscretion of children and was unconsidered ; now he was careful to review the likelihoods of his endearments before putting them to the act. Mary was quick to notice this, and, though she said nothing, regarded it as the beginning of the end. The first hint of finality was to her affection as a spark among faggots, causing at first only a little local flame which was soon stamped out, but which, smouldering its passage unseen, threatened, should a gale spring up, to leap into open conflagration.

Many kindly deeds, which Gabriel had done previously on the spur of the inclination, he now omitted ; not because he was unwilling, but because they were unsafe. Mary, noticing this secretly, construed his attitude as alienation, and redoubled her efforts that she might win him back to the old footing ; the doing of it revealed to her the real nature of her love. Everywhere she would follow him with a passion of devotion, exercising foresight for his comfort in a way which she had never thought necessary, when she had felt assured of his response. He, reading her intent, was wounded to the quick, not daring to thank her over-much, always remembering Meredith's warning word ; reviling himself for not showing more gratitude ; adding the poignant pain of pity as a stimulus to his love.

Face to face, she appeared happy as ever, docile and tender ; but when by chance he caught her unaware, he saw her sorrow, for at times her eyes were weeping.

"I am a better man than ever I was," he told himself ; "yet I seem fated to rise, not on stepping-stones of my dead selves, but of my dead friends, to higher things. How is it, I wonder ?"

Going to Meredith for an explanation, the answer was

unsatisfactory. "Life is a crucifixion," he was told. "The child is crucified for the mother, the mother for the child; the man for his friend, the friend for another man. We are here that we may learn to endure our crucifixions graciously and with joy."

Such solutions left him none the wiser, they only restated what he had already found to be unsatisfactorily true.

Months drifted noiselessly by; spring came and gave place to summer; still he lingered. The book had long since reached its final form; he refrained from sending it in, despite the publisher's frequent requests, for he knew that such an act would herald the climax.

One day, when the haymakers were in the field, and the air filled with flower fragrance, a letter arrived from Lancaster which forced him to a decision.

"Oh, Gabriel," it ran, "it is terrible, so many people to save and so few to do the work. I feel now what Christ must have felt (though I am still none of His) when He said, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth labourers into His harvest.' I have been so praying, and you know that I have never prayed for anything before, that the Lord Jesus may send you. Hilda and I have talked about it, and we think that this may be possible. If you have finished that book, do at least return to the Turnpike to see what we are doing, if it be only for a day. When once you have seen Hilda with her arms around a fallen woman, I cannot believe that you will ever have the heart to stay away. What are books when compared to the saving of human souls? I know how you will shudder at my saying it. I did not always take this view. You will possibly set me down as a fanatic, and accuse me of loss of all sense of proportion. But think, Gabriel, if there is a God, He will give us all

eternity for the writing down of our emotions ; so far as we know, the chance to reclaim these poor people comes but once—for them perhaps, for us for certain. I need you ; Hilda needs you ; these poor waifs need you—why don't you come ? Perhaps, when we are together, we may be able to teach one another to believe in Christ. The impression is daily growing stronger upon me, that without Christ we can do nothing."

Down in the meadows the sound of the haymakers burred and buzzed, but Gabriel sat and thought. Had not he, in his own blind way, been gathering toward this same conclusion ? Had not this been the trend of all his wanderings, that without Christ he could do nothing ? He had tried to love without Christ, and had failed. Helen had not written to him ; she had been disgusted with what he had told her on that last night. He could read through her pretence at bravery now. He had tried to be good without Christ ; he had only succeeded in acting the apostate to his best friend. He had escaped to the country that he might start all over again, and was now planning to forsake and break the heart of one of the best and simplest women he had ever known. Who could say what Mary would do if he were to leave her at this present juncture, when her heart was already raw ?

If he returned to London, that he might make some amends to his friend by joining him in his work of reclamation, he would do an incalculable harm to a weak, defenceless girl, who depended solely for happiness upon his love. If he remained in Wildwood he would wrong both her and his friend. How to act he could not see, unless he married Mary—a thing which was abhorrent to him, for he loved her as a sister ; his mightier love was with Helen.

Peering over the cornlands, the meadows, and the windings of the Whither, all the sweet hillside story

rose up with a fuller significance. Jesus in Nazareth seemed very possible on such a summer's evening, amid flowers in bloom and the droning of bees.

From where he sat he could see the long lie of the valley, the hollows with their Bethanies and Maries. "Why should it not have happened?" he asked; "and what should prevent its happening again?" Before his eyes were the parables of Jesus—the plough crunching backwards and forwards; the sway of the bearded corn; the still pastures, dotted with sheep. "And if I should believe, what then?" he asked. "Would that help me? Would that show me how to be just to this young girl?" He opened Lancaster's letter and reread it, coming across the now familiar words, "Life is a crusade, Gabriel; it is not a dream, as you have said. If you were here for five minutes you would agree with me."

"Crusade means slaughter," he thought. "I have not the heart for it, if it means a sorrow to Mary."

An idea struck him. Could he not avoid the difficulty as Lancaster had done with regard to Hilda—keep her close to him and protect her? This would necessitate the surrender of Helen, he foresaw; but she had already surrendered him. But would Mary be content, loving him as he now saw that she did? A vision rose up before him of the long, icy roll of the years, when youth's enthusiasms would grow less virile, and both of them would repent. Simple as Mary was, her shrewd woman's eyes would soon divine the situation, and then what? Should he sham a quality of affection for her which he could never entertain, or break her heart by telling her the bitter truth?

One thing was plain, he must act straightforwardly, and, though he dispensed with Christ, must act as though it were otherwise. "I cannot trample the Cross," he told himself. "I will not lure the hate of the Lord.

Meredith is right. I believe that there is such a thing as His hate."

The picture of the stale squalor of city streets, with their harpy multitudes, alternated with that of Christ walking through the cornfields, healing and comforting, till he was replete with a love of mankind. "Oh, to do something positive to save them!" he sighed—"to give *my* life as a ransom for many."

The evening shadows had been creeping down from the tree-tops as he sat in thought; the sun hung suspended in a giant oak across the vale. The work-people were gathering together their tools for departure when his notice was attracted by a little crowd which had assembled under a distant hedgerow. As they took their places, standing still, he saw that in their midst was a man with his hands raised, evidently in prayer. The figure was that of Meredith, and the people were already kneeling at his coming.

"Christ among the cornfields," Gabriel muttered. "Oh, that I might some day be like him!"

Perhaps for the first time in his career a true sense of the security of a Christ-dedicated life stole upon him. The startling tranquillity of Meredith's inward existence had often brought to him wonder and amazement, especially when he remembered its tempestuous beginnings; so that, when the long journey from some sparsely-attended meeting was ended, he had frequently sat up late into the night, puzzling at the door of, and fumbling for the key to, this man's calm. Here was one who by his own confessing had once been a prodigious blackguard, walking through the countryside, which had witnessed his sinning, to find peasants who knelt at his coming. What was the meaning? His eyes revisited the valley. The prayer had drawn to a close, but the worshippers still knelt till Meredith should withhold his hands.

In answer to his question the red-rimmed crescent of the sinking sun, falling beneath the lower leafage of the oak, shining from behind the evangelist, caused to spread from Meredith's feet to the uttermost limits of those for whom he prayed, sheltering them all, the long, black shadow of a cross fashioned from his body and his outstretched arms.

So sudden was the phenomenon that Gabriel sprang to his feet and ran out from behind the bushes to get a clearer view. Yes, there was the unmistakable sign—the token which Meredith had found in the snow. “He gave His life as a ransom for many; it is the part of the Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep.” The words sang their way through his memory; they explained everything. To live life well was to be for others the protecting shadow of a cross.

One by one the kneelers arose, one by one departed, the framer of the cross last of all, till the field was left empty and forsaken.

Gabriel sank upon the ground, with something like a sob. “I cannot avoid it—I cannot avoid it!” he cried.

Things immaterial and vague to the outsider, when attached to the personal life and correlated, often take on for the individual concerned the semblance of a Divine indication.

To Gabriel every detail of the past year was now all too evident in its bearing; he became assured of the presence of what Meredith had called the “Guiding Hand.”

When the mind is emotionalized it works quickly. In five minutes the problems of a ten months' continuous debate were decided. The book must be sent off at once. Wildwood must become a thing of the past, and the old, tedious life of the Turnpike resumed with a new and better purpose. Who could tell what Lancaster and he, teaming together, might not accomplish for their

brother-poor? Might not they organize and inspire others in such a way that poverty and sin, in their most repellent forms, might vanish in their own lifetime?

Vain and generous dreams of self-sacrifice haunted his mind. All the extremes of martyr-absurdities crowded into the one compartment of his brain, jostling arms and appearing commonplace as a sun at full day. A discipleship should be banded together—must be formed at once. Prisons and slums visited. The conscience of cities aroused. Wealth wrenched from the hands of the too-rich and distributed equitably among the over-poor. Capital punishment abolished. Prostitution blotted out. The saints' vision come true.

He pictured himself as speaking volubly to England, America—to all the world, of Christ and His love. Compelling men to tears; constraining them to laughter; extending over the heads of the multitude healing hands, blasphemously similar to those of his Master—yet pathetically unlike, had he only known.

All the fervour of Peter, first called from his nets, was his. His cheeks burned with the passion of his desire. He was prepared to follow everywhere, anywhere, to crucifixion and to death, now that he had once seen the light.

“Life is a crusade.” If it were not, he would render it so—a crusade in which all the world should take part.

Poor Gabriel! Had he but foreseen in how brief a while all the nobility of his promises was to be given to the test, how much more tardily would they have been made!

Thank God there are times when the hardest hearted of us all can go divinely mad; when, glancing through the scarlet gates of sacrifice, we have caught an authentic glimpse of the Christ in His Kingdom. If God would

only take us at our word at such moments, how many more martyrs could He claim, and what an army of souls He would save!

Unfortunately the testing is too often postponed to the farther day, when eyes have ceased to blaze, pulses slackened their beating, godlike heart-wounds had space for healing.

“Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest,” is the cry of the lips whereon the hands of the Nazarene are lying. Watch for the night; wait for the third crowing of the cock. If the feet are still willing to follow it is only to the door of the palace of the high priest, where purged lips shall blaspheme to the careless tune of the lazy tauntings of a serving-maid and the vulgar jeers of an idle throng.

CHAPTER XXII

A SOUND OF A GOING IN THE TOPS OF THE TREES

NEXT morning he devoted to the farewell revision of his book. So deeply was he engrossed in his task that he did not become aware of Mary's presence until she had tiptoed in front of him, and thus contrived to cast her shadow across his page. He looked up shamefacedly, maintaining silence like a school-boy caught cheating, and at last said, "Well, you see it is done."

She made no reply.

Manlike, in his hurried work he had been careless of his completed manuscript, flinging it abroad, when reread, far and wide. A breeze blowing in at the open door and window had wrought havoc, distributing it piecemeal throughout the room. Mary, with her typical construction of love into service, also to hide her emotion, bending down, commenced to gather the litter page by page, while the splashing of big tears punctuated the pauses in her labour.

Gabriel, not from unkindness, but because he dared not trust himself, feigned at continuing his revision, chewing his pen the while.

A little sob, which refused to be stifled, broke forth and roused him from his speculation. Jumping up, he crossed over to her, and, since she held her face sedulously away, laid his hands from behind upon her eyes to find them wet. The interruption proved too much for her; sinking upon

the floor, face buried in hands, she cried out her heart, refusing to be comforted.

"What shall I do? What will become of me?" she wept, till Gabriel, forgetting all previous resolutions to be circumspect, gathered her into his arms. Having quieted her, he sat down by the window, with her head thrown back against his shoulder.

"Come, little girl," he said, harping back to an abandoned endearment of address, "we have been very happy, you and I; don't spoil it all at the last by crying."

"I can't help it," she wailed pitifully, tightening her arms about his neck, in terror lest she should find him gone.

"But we could not always stay this way," he said caressingly; "we knew from the first that it could not last. Nor would it be right that we should stay; with the world so old, and its people so weary, there is much for us to do."

"But they would never miss us, Gabriel. The world is so big and has so many people—we are only two. What difference should we make? We could go quietly away together and hide in the forest; no one would be any the wiser."

"It is true that there are only two of us," he answered; "but think, Mary, there was only one of Christ."

"He has never done anything for me nor for Mother," she retorted bitterly. "Oh, Gabriel, let us continue to live as we have lived! No one will know or care."

Talking slowly and tenderly that she might understand, he told her of the suffering which he had witnessed in London streets, and, finally, read her Lancaster's letter. While he was speaking a different look came into her face, the muscles contracted, and eyebrows puckered in thought. When he had finished she was radiant. Taking both his

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"The Green Boy," she whispered ; "he has come back. He has told me." The next instant she was gone.

In the afternoon he went down to the village post-office and dispatched his book ; after which he set off in search of Meredith.

He found him seated outside his cottage, where he could get a clear view of travellers along the road, the tall holly-hocks standing like maids-in-waiting on either side, and the same old volume of *The Holy War* in his hand. He looked up as Gabriel entered the gate, and, judging there was trouble by the face, waited for him to speak. Gabriel walked straight up the path, never halting till he came to his side.

"I have made up my mind to marry Mary," he said abruptly, speaking thickly and defiantly, expecting rebuke.

Meredith closed his book with a snap, and carefully removed his spectacles.

"But you cannot ; no good would come of it. You don't love her that way."

"But I will," cried Gabriel ; "there's no one can stop me."

"Sit down beside me," Meredith said ; "there are things which you ought to know."

Gabriel sullenly obeyed. It had cost him much to arrive at his decision ; the one man to whom above all others he had looked for understanding, had been the first to disapprove. What, then, could he expect from the larger world ?

"You cannot do it," Meredith reiterated. "You don't love her that way, and I know it."

"It was you who told me that life was a crucifixion," he answered hoarsely ; "I'm sick and tired of crucifying others, it's time that I crucified myself."

"You're choosing your own cross, Gabriel ; you should leave that to the Lord Jesus."

"I'm sick of you and your Lord Jesus," he retorted hotly. "You Christians make Him an excuse for your every failure. Men can choose everything in this life except the day of their death—some of them even that. Witness the Child of whom you told me. If life were so easily explained upon your principle, don't you suppose that we should have found it out long ago?"

"Some of us have," said Meredith quietly.

A swallow flew across the garden, poised over a sunflower, dwindled out in space.

A wain in its passage to Monbridge rumbled down the road, paused on the brow of the hill to apply the skid, and disappeared round the bend to the river.

A milkmaid, clanging her pails and singing shrilly something about—

"Her love and the moon,
Which perished too soon,
When hedgerows were promising May,"

entered a field across the ribbon of white road, and vanished, knee-deep, in meadow-sweet. Behind followed a village lad, who came to the gate and stood still, leaning over the bars, till he had watched her out of sight: the love for whom she had been singing. Having furtively blown her a kiss, he also went upon his way. After this nothing broke the stillness, save for the monotonous drumming of a captive bee against the window-pane.

Finally Meredith spoke.

"Yes, there are things which you ought to know before taking such a step."

"What things?" asked Gabriel despondently.

"When I confessed to you some weeks ago, I did not tell you all."

"You told me everything except your real motive for remaining in Wildwood, and as to whether you ever

discovered the girl. What was her name? Oh yes—Dora.”

“That is what I want to tell you now. I came back to Wildwood to find Dora—to rectify my early wrong-doing. I found her.”

“And with what result? She was aged and hardened, I suppose, and didn’t want to see you.”

“Yes, she was aged, and at first she didn’t want to see me; but she had not hardened. She was better than I—much better. Her name was Dora Devon!”

Gabriel half rose with an oath, then fell back again, clenching the arms of his chair.

“She was Mary’s mother?”

“She was,” replied Meredith, lifting up his head.

“And you were——”

“Mary’s father,” said Meredith, finishing the sentence.

“Does she know of this?” Gabriel asked, after the interval of a minute had gone by.

“We never told her.”

“But why not?” exclaimed Gabriel angrily. “Why not? She had a right to know.”

“Laddie, laddie, speak more gently,” said Meredith, with a tender severity; “may you, when you have reached my age, never have to bear the shame I undergo. We did not tell her because her mother wished it so.”

“There is something here which I cannot fathom,” muttered Gabriel; and then, more audibly, “but what was her object? You returned over thousands of miles that you might do her good, and she would not so much as permit you to recognize your child.”

Meredith’s face was covered in his hands.

“That was the justest part of my punishment, and the hardest to bear. Ever since my return she has been near me, and never once have I been able to claim her for my own. Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, blood of my

blood—yet not my own. It has been hard. I have seen myself so often in her gestures, voice, way of looking at things—yet she alone of we three has never known.

“Dora would notice it and smile to me, saying nothing ; and I have had to look on in silence. I deserved it ; but, God knows, it has been hard.”

Gabriel’s anger went out before Meredith’s sorrow. He was one of those who cannot bear the sight of crying. “Poor old Dan, poor old Dan,” he kept on saying, stroking the other’s maimed hand, as though he had been a child-playmate making comfort because of a broken toy. “And she was your daughter all the time, and we never knew it.”

“Yes, lad, and she must never know.” As he spoke his great frame was shaken by a sob.

“Why don’t you tell her, Dan ? Mary is a kind little thing ; she will never blame you. She’s so friendless that she’d cry for joy, if she knew that you were her father.”

“I can never tell her, Gabriel, nor must you. You see, it was this way. When Dora ran away to London, she had to live somehow ; she was too distraught by shame to care much how—it mattered little to her what happened. If you’ve prided yourself on your purity and then sullied it, in the agony of your loss, you’re tempted to fling what fragments remain after the rest. Dora never told me in detail how her life was spent during the two years which followed, but, from the hints she let drop, it was easy to know. Some time after the birth of our child, she all at once realized that, if she continued in her ways, the little one’s future would be as ruined as her own. Somewhere or other, in walking the streets, she caught sight of a picture of the Virgin with the Child in her breast, its tiny hand folded against her cheek. On going home, she took our babe into her breast, and, as she did so, the little hand went up to her face, just as she had seen it in the picture. Then she began to think. She

made up her mind then and there to turn over a new leaf for Mary's sake. She made preparations to go into a milliner's establishment, and had not been there long when news of her parents' death reached her, and that she had inherited the farm—she was their only child. At God knows what agony of despising, she returned to this village, where much of her history was known, and settled here for her child's sake, so that no contaminating influence of loose living should tarnish her young life. She was not kindly received, for people hated her when they recalled how the old folk had died. She shrank into herself, and kept more and more alone, rarely going out. As Mary grew older and more capable of understanding what was said, it became her constant terror that she should hear something harsh about her mother, and should learn to loathe her with the rest.

“To prevent this, Dora kept her entirely to herself, never letting her out of her sight—shunning strangers and neighbours alike. She somehow got it into her head that the world was even more wicked than it really is, and that the only way in which to safeguard a girl's innocence is to teach her nothing that will help her to learn for herself. For this reason, Mary was never sent to a school, nor taught to read or write. She was, however, encouraged by her mother, who was in many ways a clever woman, to speak out her mind; to converse with and to find companionship in herself. The picture of the Virgin and Child became for Dora more than a passion, it became a mania—to keep her child still a little child, without knowledge of the world and its sin, one who could never fail as she had done, and who would never be too old to lie in her mother's arms and rest a little hand against her mother's cheek, became all her desire. You must have wondered many times at the cause of Mary's solitary upbringing.”

“ I have.”

“ Well, as you will now see, it was owing to a misdirected love, and a fatal self-experience of the sadness of life. When I returned to Wildwood, I had not been in the village a night before I learnt, to my surprise, that the Devons were still at Folly Acre. I lost no time ; I went there early next morning, only to be shown that I was far from welcome. Dora was afraid that her child might learn from me the history of her birth ; and therefore barred the door at my coming. She very naturally refused to believe in my religion. When last we met I played the part of Satan to her. Still worse, the misery of her own existence had sapped away all belief in righteousness and the Cross. It was only by an obstinacy which must have seemed cruel, that I at last forced an entrance. Little by little, she began to see that my intentions were genuine ; that, if she had suffered, so had I, and that the whole purpose of my living was to wipe out the blot from both our lives. I offered to marry her. I offered to have Mary educated. But she refused everything, as she had done before.

“ The most lingering torture for me was when, seeing how beautiful she had become through her sacrifice for our child, my early love of her flowed back on me with trebled intensity. I can now say, in glancing back, that what, as a boy, I called love, was only liking ; now that I had made the acceptance of even my best love impossible to her, the real manly passion survived. My anguish was horrible. Within her a new and pure love grew up for me ; but, for the sake of Mary, she refused to give it right of way. Our child stood between us, the reminder of a misused fondness.

“ Many's the night that I've stood outside Folly Acre, as I've seen you standing (for I have often been there in hiding, watching you, and long before you told me to-day,

I have known that this must come), and have gazed in through the window at my woman and my child sitting together, till I've been beside myself with the jealousy of longing, and have cursed God—shaking my fist at His stars—I, His evangelist. Then I have spent long nights in prayer, begging for patience and forgiveness, and protection for my child. I have scourged myself and drawn blood; starved myself; lain night-long in the forest; stood for hours breast-deep in the river, that I might batter my body and bring it into subjection to the Divine will. Yet again and again the old lust will out, and I curse God aloud.

“Dora pledged me before she died never to let Mary know our histories. My lips have been sealed towards my child. I only tell you this now, because the pain has become intolerable, and because I think that the knowledge may save you both from an irrevocable crime. Where marriage is entered into with love only on one side, it is worse than adultery; it would work you both a lasting shame. Two lives have been thrown away in her making, and I plead with you that at this time you will refrain from destroying by a useless sacrifice the sacrifice which others have already made. If you loved her with a marriage love, it would be different; you don't; you only pity her. Then there is Miss Thurm.”

At the mention of Helen, Gabriel started. Making a poverty-stricken pretence at offended dignity, he asked coldly, “And pray, what do you know of my relations with Miss Thurm?”

“I'm not free to say; but I know enough to be certain that, in giving her up for Mary, you are wronging two women, besides yourself.”

“That is for me to decide,” he cried.

“Oh, laddie, cannot you be more kind? I'm not saying this to take any pleasure out of your life; but for your

own good, and theirs—that you may all have less of sorrow.”

There was a wistful look in his eyes, and a tremor in his voice which Gabriel could not withstand.

“We’re just two poor fellows,” said Meredith, “thrown up by the great waves of eternity upon a desolate island shore. Let’s try to help each other, and be friends while we’re here together, till one of God’s ships comes by and lowers a boat, and takes us aboard.”

All the wrath had gone out of Gabriel. There, in the quiet garden among the hollyhocks, the white curve of the road and the gleam of the river in sight—painful reminders of the whereaway of life—he narrated the whole history of his own wandering, of his ambitions and faults at the Weeping Woman, of his meeting with the Poet, and of the lost love of Helen.

When all had been related, Meredith said, “I think you are disastrously mistaken about Miss Thurm. She is not the woman to abandon you lightly. What proof have you that she no longer cares for you?”

Gabriel was much mystified by Meredith’s tacit assertion of an inside knowledge of Helen and her ways. He conjectured that there had been some promise of secrecy given by Dan, which he did not care to break; but between whom, and of what a nature, he could not guess.

“What surer proof do I require than a six months’ silence following upon such a confession as mine of that night? Any woman, who had the least respect for herself, would have acted as she has acted. Not only had I betrayed my loyalty to her by making love to another woman—one whom every instinct of honour and decency should have prompted me to spare—who was, by all codes of chivalry, the wife of the man who had done me most service, but I dared to distrust and think ill of her in the meanness of my rage, imputing to her a character, if any-

thing, more base than my own—and then told her. Had I been Helen, I would have acted as she has acted. How she must hate and despise me!”

“Steady, Gabriel; God made us frail. There are no exceptions, thank the Lord. ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.’ Those words always do me good. They teach me that we are all the same, which makes it easier to forgive and to be forgiven. When you spoke as you did that night to Miss Thurm, you only said what others have thought—any woman would know that, and make allowances, perhaps even admire you, for your pluck in confessing. So you really think that her old love for you has gone away?”

“I’m confident of it,” answered Gabriel. “I must now make it my duty to forget all about her, and to marry Mary.”

“How would that help?” asked Meredith, willing to gain time.

“It would atone for my heartless follies, and prevent the misery which my thoughtlessness might bring to Mary.”

“Are you sure that it would prevent her misery? What if you never learnt to really love her as a wife? Don’t you suppose that even the brotherly feeling which you now have for her would perish? In such a case, you would do both yourself and her a far worse injury.”

“I’m sure I don’t know. I’m tired of thinking. It seems the right thing to do—the only thing to do. I shall do it,” he answered doggedly.

“Think of the long years before you, Gabriel. Don’t act rashly. You were fashioned for a purpose—the Poet recognized that in you—one which, perhaps, you have nearly accomplished: every man is, if he only knew it. The Lord has a big work for you to do somewhere; for the sake of a present petulance don’t thrust Him aside.

It is so easy to *do* ; so difficult to *retrieve*. I know this to my cost."

"Dan," he said, "you've been a good friend to me. You've taught me more of the real value of life than I ever knew before. I give you my promise that I will do nothing rashly. You know that I am not trying to please myself—only to do what is right. I must go away to think things through to a conclusion, one way or another. I want you to pray for me while I am gone."

A wind had arisen while they sat in talk, and was now tearing through the trees, so that it became difficult to speak.

Meredith rose, saying, "I've prayed for you many a night, and I'll do it again this night. I believe that all will be well. Peace go with you."

He entered his cottage and stood on the threshold, watching till Gabriel had disappeared.

Before he closed the door he halted with hand raised, listening. A mighty rushing of wind swept over the forest, with clashing of branches and whirling of fallen leaves. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the trees, then shalt thou bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee," he said. Then he shut fast the door, and entered in to pray.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN MADAM EMOTION HELD SWAY

THERE is a dark, lurking, ape-like self resident in the house of every human soul ; the skeleton in the cupboard of the other inmate, who only awaits a relaxed vigilance to crouch from his hiding to the window, to mime and burlesque his brother-tenant to the passers-by. With Gabriel this was a season of the relaxed vigilance. The visionary, who had been so intent upon seeing the world made perfect, had fallen asleep ; the ape had won loose.

When he had arrived at Meredith's gate it had been with the martyr-glow of conscious self-annihilation upon him, and that artificial, tense quietude in his heart which follows the repression of unanswerable argument. That day the final perusal of his book had made him positive—as is often the case with authors—that whether or no he had obtained fame, he most certainly deserved it. He was sure that there never was, nor could be, such a book as his. This last must, of course, always be true, unless every page be a plagiarism : since no two men are ever alike, neither are two men's books. Unhappily this is no criterion of merit. Again, in interpreting his work to himself, a man constantly construes all that he has intended to say, rather than what he has actually written. Thus the ancient saw is verified, that the greatest books are those still left to write. Notwithstanding, they *have been read*—by their authors, who, imagining one thing, penned another.

Therefore this day had been glad to Gabriel, for he knew that he had added one more volume to the world's library of immortals.

On the other hand, the day had been very sad, for reasons already stated. Knowing himself to be a master-worker, he was deliberately planning to wreck his career. This, for the pleasure of a small country Miss who had been pleased to garble the true nature of his regard for her.

"Good-bye, books," he had said, as he dropped his copy into the letter-box; "you are the greatest book that I shall ever write."

Among the many unanswerable arguments upon which he had turned his back were those of his duty to his parents, to Lancaster, and to Helen. A picture had mastered his mind, driving every hostility from the horizon; the picture of Meredith, casting athwart his kneeling peasants the self-made shadow of a cross. As immediate sequel to the vision had come the weeping, pathetic figure of Mary, making a large demand upon his charity, and reawakening those promptings to the heroic altruism which he had learnt so much to admire. The divine, intoxicating desire throbbed through his every fibre to destroy, indiscreetly and at once, every personal motive. Her appeal had become for him prophetic, indisputable, not to be disobeyed.

Meredith's attitude had jarred upon him. It was horrible that this man, who had but yesterday painted for him the true mission of his life, should now, when everything had been fought out and ordained, revive the pleadings of the devil's advocate. Meredith had been responsible for the shadow of the cross which had fallen with so great a promise of peace across his heart; yet, perversely enough, he was first to deny the shadow's authenticity. It was this mixed feeling of niggardly dis-

appointment and overthrown enthusiasm which had so irritated him during their conversation in the garden. To hear prosaic, money-market advice, coming from the lips of one whom he had revered as dreamer and idealist, had carried him off his feet with rage.

Now that he had made allowances, and in some wise comprehended Meredith's point of view, a fresh difficulty confronted him—that of Mary's irregular parentage.

Whilst he had been in ignorance of it he had felt sure that, despite an impolitic marriage, in the event of the certain success of his book, reconciliation between himself and his father could still take place. This latest knowledge made such a hope impossible; moreover, it foreshadowed financial difficulties.

His parents were plain, sensible people, both of humble origin, whom the simple goodness of Mary, once seen, would soon have pacified. Meredith's revelation complicated matters to a horrible extent.

Like most kindly and socially charitable women, his mother entertained a morbid terror of anything unconventional in births or marriages, never halting to discriminate between offences native and imported. He knew that, should he marry under these altered conditions, an unbridgeable gulf between him and his home would inevitably result.

This would entail no mere sentimental loss, but a very real one, in the shape of resources. In debating the situation with himself, he saw clearly that there was no chance of making much pecuniary gain out of a first volume of verse. This meant that he, with his traditions and cultured training, would be forced to swamp his literary tastes in the farming of Folly Acre. That he, with his lofty aims, should become an agriculturist was too absurd. After all, he asked himself, was there not an element too entirely quixotic and melodramatic about his

alternatives of choice to merit a moment's indecision? Had he not over-accused himself in the recapitulation of his dealings with this girl? Indeed, was he in any way to blame for the growth of her affection? was it not rather owing to her curious upbringing? Such wildness of unrestraint as she had displayed that morning did not mean so much to one who had never been taught the art of repression. Meredith, as her father, must certainly be more deeply interested in her welfare than he; Meredith was a man of the world, a religious man at that, and Meredith had dissuaded.

This was Gabriel's troubled frame of mind, when, striding out from the wood-path which he had been traversing, on to the banks of the Whither, he came face to face with the object of his debate walking toward him. A space of four or five yards divided them; there could be no turning back. The track was narrow; no pretence at an unconscious passing was possible. Neither of these did he desire.

Intellect never has, nor can be the paramount quality in Man; he possesses too much of the feminine in his nature. When King Reason has signed, ordered, and docketed his decrees, dismissed this counsellor, and summoned that, terminated a war, arbitrated a peace, opened up new hostilities, and, the day's work completed, is about to leave his Palace of the Soul, Madam Emotion storms up the steps, bundles his Majesty into an outhouse, dismisses his statesmen, destroys his documents, and commences the business of living all over afresh in her own high-handed way.

At the turn in the path her Ladyship had arrived tempestuous, tornado-wise, too imperial for battle, claiming dictatorship as her right.

The walk by the river was thickly treed, sloping away beneath overhanging boughs to the water's edge. Between

modulated lights and romantic tracery of bracken and branch the silver gleam of the Whither shone tremulous for the space of a mile.

Hard by, if legend spake true, stretched tunnelled the haunted hollows of King Arthur's Cave, made sacred by memories of the Table Round. 'Twas a knightly valley, if such there be, full of the echoes of banished chivalries, distant from the battering bathos of cities' clangour—a resting-place for disappointed men, and a fitting refuge for those heart-weary by reason of the lost perfection.

Here it was, in the home of nightingales, in the shade of the forest that they met. She was all in white. Since his coming she had grown more scrupulous in her dress. Her hair was gathered up from off the shoulders into a spacious knot, her cheeks were aglow with exertion, her lips parted. Seeing him, she halted irresolute—only for a moment. Tripping toward him, placing her arms about his neck, with the old affection of their first friendship, she said, “Come, dear Gabriel; let us try to forget that it is all ended. Just for this evening let us pretend, as we used to do, that there will be no change.”

It was always the old argument with her, that they should try to forget.

With her lips so near to his own, and her breath upon his face, resistance became impossible. Madam Emotion had her way.

Bending down and kissing her, he said laughingly, catching at her mood, “And what if it is not all ended? What if I should stay?”

“That is not to be,” she sighed; “you yourself have said it. It is impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible to the man of strong purpose,” he cried. “I am ready to become the captain of my fate; we all can, if we will only try. What if I should stay and marry you?”

Her hands flew up convulsively to her throat, her face flushing. "Gabriel," she cried, "you don't mean that!"

This questioning of his sincerity spurred him on to more emphatic assertion. "But I do—I do. We two will live together at Folly Acre for ever and for ever. We will allow no change."

"And if the change should come despite ourselves?"

"We will bar our doors against him, as your forefathers did theirs against the Commonwealth soldiers."

King Cophetua and his beggar-maid were not more glad than they. What Gabriel lacked in passion he made up for in banter and fairy-talk; for Mary it was all too serious.

They were children playing out a game. To one it was real life, to the other it seemed so.

Wandering the river-bank, halting here and there to pluck a flower, to watch a king-fisher take his dive, to listen to the song of a bird, they were happy.

Once they clambered out to a rock, where they sat laving their hands in the running stream. Once they stole tiptoe through the copse to a throstle's nest, and, peeping in, discovered two little eggs of greenish-blue.

He narrated to her all the fond stories at his command, things of which she had never heard; of a poet named Dante and his Beatrice; of another named Petrarch and his Laura; of Sir Galahad, to whom love was denied; and of Guinevere whose feet had ruffled those self-same glens.

They had been too much together through the past months to have anything very new to say; so, when the tales were at an end, they were content to sit peasant-fashion, hand-in-hand, listening to the calling of Mother Nature and to the throb of their own two hearts.

A shred of moon crept out from between the heads of the forest and looked down on them, and withdrew. The darkness stole out around them, and found them still

sitting. Distant down the river in a deep pool, which 'twas said had never been fathomed, a large fish splashed and plunged. The stars winked and twinkled their passage from under clouds, and the wind, which had spoken roughly in the fuller day, now sighed away in a whisper.

No word passed. They arose and went. When they had reached the farm-house door, jasmine-covered and fragrant, as he turned to leave her, she said, "And this is for ever?"

"For ever," he echoed her.

Back through the woods he passed, if not ecstatic, at least at peace. Madam Emotion had had her day; King Reason had set up his throne.

"Nevertheless," he argued, "if I do not love her in that way, I have done what seemed to me just—and she is happy." And more hesitatingly, as he fell asleep, "And so am I."

CHAPTER XXIV

LIGHTING A FIRE

AN hour had elapsed since Gabriel's footstep had echoed along the cobble-track which led down from Folly Acre, when a shadow stole out from a neighbouring clump of trees ; a man hobbled up the pathway, and knocked at the door.

"Who is there ?" asked the voice of Mary from within, where she was safe in bed.

"It is I, Dan. Let me in ; I must speak with you."

"I thought it was you by your knock. Wait a minute," she replied. There was a sound of the striking of matches ; a light was kindled, and the door unlatched from within. Mary stood before him on the threshold in night attire, her hair long and loose, a shawl gathered tightly across her shoulders and secured by one hand across her breast.

"Come in. What is it that you want ?" she asked, when the door had been shut, and the candle placed upon the table.

Meredith, having refused to be seated, stood in the middle of the great room, leaning heavily against the back of a chair.

"I wouldn't have come," he said softly, "but there was need."

Instinctively she forejudged what was coming. Shaking abroad her hair with a hint of defiance, she asked, "What need ?"

Meredith hesitated, endeavouring to fashion his words into the gentlest form.

Before he could answer, "Does it concern Gabriel?" she asked.

He nodded assent.

"Then you have come too late. He has asked me to be his wife." She spoke as though the mere exchange of promises concluded everything—barriered retreat.

"But you cannot," he blurted out.

"And why not?" she questioned in the same low, even tones.

"Because—because he does not love you, lassie."

"Whether, in such a case, am I to take your word or his as the truer?"

"But it cannot be," he repeated, "it cannot be. Gabriel does not love you; not in that way—not to the extent of marriage."

"How do you know?" she asked. "He has just told me that he does."

"Because he owned as much to me this afternoon," Meredith answered; but his heart was filled with pity at the sight of her tense white face.

"Then I do not believe you," she replied. She spoke so softly that he scarce caught what she said.

"It is true," he cried. "If you do not believe me to-night, you will some other night, and bitterly."

Craning across the table which separated them, till her face was touching his and her hair was singed in the flame, she whispered in the same passionless tones, "But I do not believe you. I will not. You have lied."

In all the melancholy of his broken years, and the unsatisfied craving after paternity, which comes to all childless men when once they have passed the meridian of life, there had always been for Meredith a solace in the thought that he was near, though unknown, to his

offspring, and could call forth her love. Now that the scathing words had been spoken, all confidence between them must be for ever at an end, unless—unless he broke his promise to the dead woman, and enlightened his child as to her origin. This alone would excuse to her his persistent interest in her intimate affairs. For an instant he wavered; the temptation passed.

Turning, without another word, he passed out into the night. She, following him, closed the door and extinguished the light.

Where women's hearts are concerned, even the gentlest are capable of worse cruelty than the most brutal of men. Marriage love is for them the fulfilment of all desire, whereas with men it is but one of a multitude of interests; in its defence they strike to kill, where men would only smile.

The ruthless blow, which had been dealt so easily, had struck home. Reaching a field of clover which ran beside the house, Meredith flung himself, sobbing, into the tangled growth of grass.

So still did he lie, that a vixen, on a mound near by, led forth her cubs to play. Gambolling with them and making swift feints at attack, she would stamp her foot suddenly, signalling danger. At that sign, each fluffy urchin quickly disappeared. Once one of them, more wilful than his brothers in his love of the moonlight, failed to obey. Quick as lightning she flashed upon him, the white teeth gaping; a smothered squeal, and the truant returned precipitately to his mother's control. The game was repeated—the leading forth, the signal, the flight—till all had learnt the lesson. Then, snuggling them around and under her, with tenderness that was almost human, she gave them sup, lying red and silent against the long white furrow of the moon.

The spectacle of family cravings, so naturally gratified

amongst wild animals, caused him to perceive anew the utterness of his loss. Burying his face in the sweet meadow flowers, so deep that his nostrils were filled with the primal fragrance of the dewy turf, he groaned aloud, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. For Christ's sake spare me, and say that it is not true. Only a dream, O God—a bad dream. For Thy mercy's sake."

When the dawn was breaking, weary and spent with his grief, he crawled into the hollow of a neighbouring hedge and fell asleep. Thus was his prayer answered.

With Mary the night went far otherwise. This was the first night of her love, and her soul sang within her. She was possessed by an exultant sensation of timelessness. She dwelt neither here nor there, at this hour nor at that. The advent of Meredith had been but a passing cloud—when its shadow had departed, the substance itself was forgotten.

It was as though in the dreary commonplace of a well-known street many gates had suddenly opened, letting in visions of scent, and sight, and sound, such as had never been hinted at in her most glorious dreams. That which had become so weariful to her, by reason of the tedium of its familiarity, now tingled with many-coloured forks of flame, blazed and brightened. Each threadbare thought and timeworn saying met her with the kindly eyes of an old friend made new. A daring artist had stolen down the thoroughfare of her life, between dusk and dawn, splashing grey wall and broken parapet with violet and mauve, yellow and green, to greet her awakened eyes. The silence of the night, which she had so often feared, became God's speaking voice. The crickets, chirping on the hearth, were tongues of congratulation, merry-makers in her love. She laughed till the tears came, to think how wide and joyous was the world, and how narrow and bleak she had supposed it to be. The past became dear

to her; the future a glittering array of gilded domes and shining spires. Was not this the first night of her new-found love?

With quiet eyes and folded hands she lay, the old house hushed and still, save for the occasional groanings and creaks of ancient joists. The white sheets she had pulled well up to her ears, with her face turned outwards to the window, which stood at the far end of the room, through which a shaft of moonlight fell across the foot of her bed. To her, old Earth seemed very beautiful and untragic. As the stars worked round toward the dawn, the moonlight shifted. The last thing seen by her closing eyes was the sculptured scroll, "Semper Morare." She smiled faintly, in pity at its sluggard's counsel, "Always Delay," and in contempt at its disproved wisdom; then raised the anchor and sailed away to the pacific islands of sleep.

When Gabriel arose next morning it was with the full determination once and for ever to put an end to all wavering by breaking down his bridges behind. That this might be the better accomplished he set to work to sort out from among his belongings everything which might tend to make him homesick for bygone days. There was no good, he told himself, in carrying about with him the weapons for his own destruction in the shape of old letters, diaries, and other fond odds and ends.

First, before all, he eliminated all notes and treasured reminders of Helen, gathering them together into a pile by themselves. These consisted of dance-programmes upon which her name was written, scraps of flowers which she had worn, various trifles endeared by her woman's hands.

Relaxing and tender memories swam upwards in his mind as he heaped together these mementoes of his first and only love, but he crushed them down as out of reason and unworthy. Every letter from father, or mother, or

friend, which contained a mention of her name he went carefully over and laid beside the rest, that all thought of her might be utterly blotted out in the monotony of the years that were to come. He had selected his path; he meant to follow it like a man, allowing no opportunity for misgiving. He was going to marry Mary, and, despite all difficulties, was intent upon giving her the best that man could give; to this end all mention of fonder names must be forgotten. He had sense enough to know that for him it would be an uphill fight, which, if it was to be won, could bear no strain of unnecessary impedimenta. Therefore he destroyed. Of the future and its consequences he would not permit himself to think, lest the picture of hard manual toil and visions growing less should unnerve him. He believed that he was doing the right thing; that was enough. He must now go blindly on—further thought would be demoralizing.

Until late into the afternoon he proceeded with these labours. In the forenoon Mary had come to visit him, as her habit had been to do during some portion of every day. She had been surprised and grieved when, looking up from among the dust and confusion, he had asked her to leave him alone for that one day. Truth to tell, she had already been disappointed at his not coming early to Folly Acre, and had only been persuaded to make the first advance, after several hours of fruitless expectation, by a lover's tender fears for the welfare of the beloved. All the pretty things which she had planned to do and say had been time wasted. On this, the first sunrise of their engagement, no tenderness had been exchanged.

Remembering what Meredith had said, she was filled with dread. She felt the need of him now; perhaps he might explain.

Hurrying down through the woods to the roadway she came to his house. On opening the door, much to her

annoyance she discovered that he was not at home. After wandering through the garden, calling his name, she was on the point of leaving, when a small boy—one of those whom Meredith had befriended—came trotting up, bawling out that old Dan had driven away. At sight of Mary he started back, and would have made good his escape had she not pounced upon him, telling him not to be afraid, and demanding a fuller explanation. The boy's one idea being to get free, he quickly told as much as he knew—that Mr. Meredith had hired a horse and gig from the Silver Horn at about six o'clock that morning, and, without saying where he was going, had started off along the Monbridge road. Mary was puzzled at this. Dan always walked, however far the distance. Something important must have happened—perhaps concerning herself.

Mystified and sad she returned to Folly Acre, whence, periodically throughout the day, she made excursions by stealth to Gabriel's cottage to discover what was keeping him, and openly to Meredith's, in the hope that he might be home. Meanwhile, Gabriel proceeded steadily with his work. He had sorted out his papers, and was about to carry the dangerous ones out into the garden to burn, when he noticed his Oxford gown and hood, which he had purchased with so much foolish pride in the first flush of his academic honours. Over these he paused; then, muttering, "What earthly good are they to a man who's going to be a farmer?" hurried them into the same motley pile.

Whistling lightheartedly, as if engaged in a diurnal task, he gathered into the folds of the gown these frail historians of his life, and walked out into the evening light.

Sauntering through the hazy distance he saw what appeared to be two horsemen approaching, but to these

he paid little heed. A slight breeze was blowing, so that it became necessary for him to find out a quiet corner where the papers would not scatter. Walking round to the side of the house he dumped his burden down under a protecting hedge some five feet high, and set about collecting twigs to light the fire. This done, he searched his pockets for matches, and discovered a box containing only one. He struck and applied it successfully, but whether it was that the wood was green or the papers damp, after leaping up into a short, quick blaze, the flame died down, smouldering and sullen. Going upon his hands and knees he commenced to blow, puffing out his cheeks. He succeeded in awakening a spasmodic glow and in filling his eyes with smoke.

Some little time was consumed in this occupation. So intent was he upon it that he did not notice the nearer approach of the horsemen until they had drawn level with him—the hedge between.

Rising from his kneeling position, he saw two mounted figures, but, being temporarily blinded by the smoke, failed to recognize their identity.

“Pardon me, but can I borrow a match from you?” he said, looking over the hedge; “my fire refuses to light.”

Had his eyes been clearer he would have perceived the amused smile which one stranger threw at the other as he reined in his horse and, answering nothing, handed over his gold-mounted box.

Gabriel took it, saying, “Thank you; I won’t detain you a minute,” and going upon his hands and knees, pushing the paper farther under the wood, soon had the whole mass flaring away like a fifth of November festival.

As his sight returned the box which he held in his hand became familiar. Just as the memory had dawned upon him that it was one which he himself had given, a peal of laughter greeted him.

“And now, if you have finished with my matches, you may find time to welcome your friends.”

Rising erect upon his feet, and gazing over at the comers, he recognized Rupert and Helen Thurm. At first sight he was too amazed and abashed for speech. It was as though, out of the destruction of the flames, the presence of the past had risen up to smite him. Rupert had dismounted and was helping his sister to alight. Something had to be done. Walking round to the gate he stepped out into the path and joined them. Despite all pangs of conscience his soul was glad, rebelliously and riotously glad. His eyes dwelt upon Helen with a fixity of delight; his throat seemed to have grown up so that he could not speak. She was clothed in a long, green riding-habit, close fitting. The bodice was open at the neck, filled in with a femininity of lace. Her hair, burnished in the declining sunlight, was worn low over the temples, leaving a broad expanse of brow surmounted by a Gainsborough hat from which a feather drooped low across the brim. The left hand was gauntleted, the right one free. It looked to him infinitely little as it toyed caressingly with the long mane of the high sorrel which she rode. Knowing that he was expected to speak, he blundered out, “If you’re going to spend the night here, I don’t know what to do with your horses; I haven’t any stables.”

Rupert let out a hearty laugh at this refinement of rudeness.

Helen made a wry little face, saying, “You have a curious way of receiving company, Gabriel. Is it your own invention, or just the custom of the country?”

“Something of both,” he answered quietly, and then, to busy his hands, set to work unsaddling and tethering the horses.

“You’ve come a pretty long way?” he asked of Rupert,

running his hand over the horses' legs, and noticing that they were dusty and damp.

"No, not really far, only six miles the other side of Monbridge."

"What are you doing there?"

"Stopping at Hollywood with Sir Danver Cartwright, whose daughter is one of Helen's friends. They roomed together in Vienna, you know, when studying music there."

"Cartwright, Cartwright. The name sounds familiar. Oh yes, I remember, it was Sybil Cartwright's portrait that you always kept on your writing-table at Oxford, and that we used to chaff you about. Now I see."

"What do you see?" asked Rupert, his good-natured face becoming as surly as it was possible for it to be.

"Oh, nothing," replied Gabriel, with a disowning expression of the hands; "only developments."

"She's the best girl that ever was," said the other, taking Gabriel's arm, and following up the path to the cottage, where Helen stood waiting them.

"Why, Rupert, you're blushing," she cried, clapping her hands. "You don't know how it improves you. Sybil would be more pleased than ever with you. Why don't you do it always? What has Gabriel been telling you?"

"Nothing that I didn't know before. He's guessed everything."

"Has he? Then he must be cleverer than I took him for."

On entering the cottage, Gabriel set about preparing a meal of eggs, and honey, and home-made bread. They allowed him to do it alone, just to see whether he really could.

"What an ideal place in which to spend the first year of one's married life! Two rooms and a garden—what more could man desire?" crooned Rupert, half to himself.

“Hark to him!” laughed Helen. “Would you believe that it was the same Rupert of six months ago? Then it was all theatres and dinings out; now it’s a cottage and bee-hives!”

“Don’t laugh at him,” said Gabriel, smiling towards her out of the corners of his eyes; “I like him much better this way. He’s very much improved.”

“And how do you suppose you’d get along without your horses and people to wait on you, if you lived here? You’d have to do everything for yourself, you know, and quite a good deal for her,” Helen pursued, in a mocking vein.

“You’ve got no sentiment about you at all, Helen. What do you suppose a man marries a woman for, if it isn’t to do everything for her?”

“Yes, my dear, but you’ve had no practice. All these years you might have been experimenting on me—think of the opportunities you’ve wasted.”

“There you show your lack of education,” her brother replied; then turning to Gabriel, “Do you remember what old Professor Gravenlands used to say, how the soul of man is an entanglement of impulse, and of dormant instinct, which awaits the master-hand of crisis to unravel the skein? Well, I’m depending upon the crisis of marriage to reel off all my unsuspected virtues. I’m confident that they’re there.”

“A most comforting philosophy,” hummed Helen.

Gabriel had now finished his task of laying the table, so they sat down to a belated tea.

“And what brought you here so unexpectedly?” asked Gabriel, his mouth full of lettuce, and bread and butter.

Rupert looked across at Helen, waiting for her to reply, and when she said nothing, answered, “We’ve only been at the Cartwrights’ two days, and we didn’t, at least I didn’t, know how far Wildwood was away. We, of course,

intended coming to see you within the first week, anyhow. As it is, we've come sooner than we expected."

At this point Helen looked up sharply, trying to catch her brother's eye, but he was otherwise engaged, pouring himself out a third cup of tea.

"This morning, just as we were sitting down to breakfast, an old ruffian named Dan Meredith, whom Sir Danver knows and says is a very fine fellow, drove up and asked to see Helen."

Here there was an interruption, in which Rupert informed his sister that it was his leg and not the table's that she was kicking, a thing which she very well knew.

"How he came to be acquainted with Helen, or came to know that we were staying there, I can't tell."

"That's easily explained," Helen broke in a little angrily: "I got to know Dan four years ago, when I was spending the Easter with Sybil. He used to go round preaching, and Sir Danver used sometimes to go with him. Sybil was very fond of Dan, and I got to like him, so we used to go and sing for him on occasions, just to help him along."

"But he looks such an odd specimen," expostulated Rupert, forgetting his own narration. "What in the name of goodness can persuade Sybil's father to take up with such a ruin?"

"Sybil once told me the story of his life," replied Helen, eager to keep her brother's thoughts occupied. "I forget the exact details now. From what I remember, it was Dan's father who gave Sir Danver his first chance, when they were young men out in West Africa. They did a very brave deed together; I can't recall what. Anyhow, the Governor grew jealous of Danver Cartwright, and tried to break him, by writing home damaging statements about his conduct. Dan's father was the one man who could save him, and that only at the expense of his own reputation."

Nevertheless, he did it, and was himself retired on a paltry pension, a discredited man. Sir Danver got immediate promotion, and was kept abroad as governor of one colony and another for many years; but it was always his intention, when he returned to England for good, to search out the man who had gone under for his sake, and to do something to reinstate him. Ten years ago, when he retired from the service, he bought Hollywood, and came there to live; partly because he was attracted by the beauty of the country, but mostly because he knew that the Meredith family came from around these parts.

“On inquiry he found that old Meredith was dead, having given way to drink, and that all his children were scattered. He tried to follow them up, but couldn’t get a trace of them beyond the fact that the eldest son had got into a scrape and run away to Canada.

“He had given up the search as hopeless when, five years ago, he got news that Dan, the eldest, and by all accounts the worst, had returned to Wildwood and purchased a cottage. He went over at once, expecting to find some broken-down rake, determined in any case to do his best for him.

“Dan was out when he called, but a villager told him that ‘the man from foreign parts’ was visiting a sick woman named Zilly Slipper—one of the lowest people in the district. Sir Danver followed him up, and found him in a wretched hovel, praying with the woman and caring for her needs. No one else in the village would do this, because of her bad reputation, and because she was supposed to be a witch.

“It appeared that Dan had given up his old courses, and had become an unpaid preacher and tender to the poor.

“He wouldn’t accept any money; he had plenty of his own. The only way in which he would allow Sir Danver

to help him was by giving him his friendship and private sympathy. Sir Danver encouraged us girls to go about with him. He said that Dan and his father were the two largest-hearted men that he had ever known. Since then, Dan and I have become firm friends."

"Meredith told me something of this," said Gabriel, "but not the last part about Sir Danver Cartwright. That is new to me."

"Now let me get along with my tale," said Rupert, suddenly remembering that he had been interrupted.

"Go on," said Gabriel; but Helen looked uncomfortable.

"Well, as I was saying, just as we were sitting down to breakfast, up drives Meredith—he'd evidently been driving very fast—and asks for Helen. I don't know what he said to her, but the upshot of the affair is that Helen's been fidgeting to get to you all day. We had an engagement to lunch out, which kept us from coming earlier. Helen wanted to put it off, but Sybil wouldn't hear of it, so we came this afternoon instead."

During the last few minutes, Gabriel had been seeking to catch Helen's eyes, for a thought had come to him which he wanted to put to the test. Her averted face and feverish anxiety to avoid his gaze were sufficient answer.

It was Helen, then, who had engaged the cottage for him! During that night drive in the Park he had put her in possession of all his secrets, and she, early the following morning, must have gone to see the Poet, that she might make her offer through his agency, and herself remain unsuspected. He remembered now how non-committal the wording of the Poet's letter had been, commencing abruptly, without preliminary address or dating, "A cottage has been placed at your disposal," etc., ending without signature. She had recognized that his confession to her of the previous night had made it impossible for him to accept any semblance of help from

her, and, therefore, had contrived this delicate means of assisting him, thus avoiding the pain of refusal, by combining with her old lover in his plans for the welfare of the man whom he believed to be his nobler self.

Here, again, was an explanation for her long silence: she had been fearful lest, had correspondence taken place between them, her share in his maintenance might be discovered. He had once more been led into a misjudgment of her by her own goodness and kindness.

While in this hurried train of thought, he dimly apprehended that, if his suppositions were correct, this must entail innumerable complications in his relationships all round—in the case of Mary most of all.

What was the meaning of Meredith's morning expedition and of Helen's immediate response? Did she know that there was such a person as Mary? and, if so, how far did her knowledge extend?

"You are one of the most tactless persons that ever was," Helen was saying, half playfully. "If you don't scrab together a little more discretion before you marry, I pity your wife. Didn't you know that I wanted to keep my anxiety to come and see Gabriel secret from him. What girl wouldn't?"

"But, my dear Helen," Rupert was arguing, "who are you to talk about discretion? You give me away right and left, and speak of me to my friends as if I were a husband of long standing; and I'm hardly as yet engaged. You don't seem to understand that love is a very shy little boy who doesn't like being perambulated through the public parks—no, not even when his big sister holds his hand."

"Then why did he choose the open landing as a suitable place whereon to embrace his Sybil last night, when he knew that every one was just coming down to dinner?"

“Because he is very susceptible, and, when he sees a pretty pair of lips to kiss, he can’t help kissing them.”

“There—I condemn you out of your own mouth; you call him susceptible, I call him indiscreet. The first is the preface to the whole book.”

“What’s all this about?” asked Gabriel, waking up out of his trance.

“A little dialogue on the timidity of love, of which Helen is the happy illustration,” answered Rupert. “She couldn’t endure to be absent from you any longer, yet, for some obscure reason, didn’t want to call upon you openly; so split the difference by coming to the Cartwrights’, where she could be near you without being seen by you. All this, under the false pretence that she sympathized with Sybil and myself. Now will you please excuse my asking, since you don’t invite me, but I’d like a fourth cup of tea.”

“Love appears to be a very greedy little boy,” said Helen, rising from the table, and going over to the window to hide her blushes.

“No, not greedy; don’t say that. Say that he is hungry, and has a child’s appetite.”

“And therefore should be left by his elders to feed by himself,” she concluded. “Come out with me into the garden”—turning toward Gabriel—“I want to see whether you have really been living the simple life, or only shamming.”

Fearing what was coming, yet with a pitiful display of alacrity, he obeyed her summons, following her down between the rose-trees to the bottom of the walk, where an arbour had been constructed. From here a view of the neighbouring valley could be obtained, together with the opening up of the plain where the blazoned turrets of the distant city hung golden and fragmentary in the waning light.

"Faery-land," she sighed, pointing with her hand.

"And yet, like all our legends," he answered, "so very false. A few clouds, a little sunlight, a pile of chimney-stacks—from these we fashion our illusions and our dreams. It is not the things in themselves that are beautiful, it is the way that we associate them."

"Therefore," said she, in a low, clear voice, "we should be the more careful as to how, and with whom, we associate our lives."

Whether it was meant for a home thrust or not, it succeeded. Gabriel leant farther forward, looking out upon the river, silent and prepared. Nothing as yet happened.

"Have you finished the book?" she asked.

"Yes; I despatched it yesterday."

"Is it so good as you expected it to be?"

"Better."

"Then you have succeeded in everything, and are happy?"

"In almost everything."

"Where have you failed?"

"I have not failed, but I have lost some things."

"What things? Come, Gabriel, tell me what have you lost?"

She spoke in a bantering tone, having more knowledge of the matter in hand than she cared to relate.

Gabriel turned quietly towards her, and, looking full into her eyes, replied—

"Helen, I think you know."

"But lost things can be found," she answered sadly.

"Yes, but too often only at the expense of grief to others."

At once she became serious, intensely so, her hands clasping and unclasping in the old fashion; yet she did not speak. Rupert's voice was heard calling, and Gabriel,

glad of an ease to his suspense, stepped out from among the roses and answered.

As he came towards them he shouted—

“Oh, Gabriel, some one’s just been here asking for you. Such a pretty girl; I don’t wonder that you like the country. I told her that you were down the garden. She must have gone down and peeped in at you, for I saw her come scampering back again with her cheeks all aflame, looking as though she hadn’t been made very welcome.”

“Did she say what her name was?” asked Helen, coming out from the arbour.

“Mary something or other; I didn’t catch quite what. She was very good-looking.”

“Her name was Mary Devon, I think,” said Gabriel, turning aside and plucking a flower.

“Any relation to old Meredith?” asked Rupert casually. “She seemed to me to have his mouth and eyes.”

It was a lazy shot, sent out with no particular destination in view; nevertheless, it hit the mark.

Gabriel swung quickly round to find Helen’s eyes upon him.

“All people are more or less related in these parts,” he said, with the violence of a man flinging down a challenge.

“I suppose so,” drawled Rupert, quite unconscious of his transgression. “That’s the great advantage of living in a city; you have no relations—all your aunts and uncles die off. We had quite an epidemic of relations, until we removed to London. Hadn’t we, Helen? Then we invited them slowly, and with great caution, so as not to scare them, to come and stay with us. One by one they went back to the land and gradually departed this life. Some of them took an unreasonably long time about it; but now they’re all gone—all except Aunt Agatha. She was too stingy to pay the railway fare to come and visit us.

I wonder whether we could be hanged for it. They couldn't bring it in as manslaughter; it was premeditated."

"What nonsense you talk, Rupert. You need a tonic of some sort, probably Sybil. You're not well without her." For all her apparent desire to depart she lingered, loath to go.

"Come on, Gabriel," cried Rupert, setting off up the path; "let's get the horses saddled. I suppose it will be pretty late by the time we get back."

Having strapped and buckled as hurriedly as they could, Rupert volunteered to stand by the horses' heads while Gabriel went to fetch Helen.

The garden was growing dusk, so that it was difficult to see. Search as he would, no Helen could he find. He looked into the arbour, but it was empty. He peered in at the door of the cottage and whispered her name, but received no answer. When he was on the point of returning to Rupert, thinking that she must have joined him of her own accord, his nostrils caught the smell of burning. Quick as thought, he ran toward the corner of the hedge where the bonfire had been lit. As he went, there came drifting down the path toward him a fragment of white. He stooped and picked it up. It was the torn, crumpled page of a love-letter, written to him by Helen in the June of the previous summer. Indistinct in the half-light he could just decipher the words—quite well enough to recover the sudden pang of a pleasure past. As he neared the spot where he knew that she must be, he called her name more softly, lest an unheralded approach should make him seem too much like a spy. She did not answer. There, in the gloaming, he could discern her standing, erect and statuesque, beside the still unconsumed records of his love for her. The detective wind, which had so spitefully prevented the first kindling by extinguishing the match, had treated Helen in like manner to Gabriel, by carrying

the charred fragment of a letter to her feet as she ascended the path. In her hand she held the other half to the last year's letter.

"Your brother is waiting for you," he whispered.

She seemed not to notice what he had said, but, stirring the smouldering heap with her foot, said in a dreary voice—

"It is a pity it would not light."

Then, turning slowly round, they walked side by side toward the gate. Rupert, being now a lover himself, had learnt the ways of love, and, thinking that he read the situation, passed no remark on their prolonged absence.

Gabriel helped her to mount, and had already bade them a conventional "good-night," when Helen reined in her horse, thus falling several paces behind her brother. Leaning over, she caught Gabriel by the shoulder, and, bending so close that her lips touched his ear, whispered—

"Look in the rose-bush nearest the arbour—the one with the red roses. Do not forget."

With this they vanished in the on-coming night.

CHAPTER XXV

THE APPARITION

WHEN the last ring of the horses' hoofs had died out upon the silence, and the last length of swaying shadow had been lost in the surrounding gloom, Gabriel returned to the garden and hurried down to the terrace of roses. "Look in the rose-bush nearest the arbour—the one with the red roses," she had said. What was it that made it so imperative for him to look there, he wondered. Was it a statement of the withdrawal on her part of all further love? Oddly enough, the mere suggestion filled him with the clamour of catastrophe. He, who was already betrothed to a girl of the village, was agonized at so small a hint of losing the marital affection of one whom he could no longer hope to win. The heart must be for ever libertine and pagan, over-riding the laws of men and worshipping strange gods. Where the head has painstakingly selected the heart riotously chooses. Singly they are the most respectable of citizens, but together they can never agree. This Gabriel discovered as he searched for the token of his fate—the discordant inhabitants of the tenement of his soul had fallen out again; the battle was waging; no word of his could stop the fight. "Look in the rose-bush nearest the arbour—the one with the red roses." There were two clumps of blossom near the arbour, either of which might answer to the description. The flowers of the one were vivid, inclining toward an angry pink; of the other a dark, dull red.

Puzzled, he halted between the two, not knowing which to search first, anxious for the climax, yet willing to postpone. Prompting him to decision, snatches of the lines which Helen had sung that night by the Thames stole back upon him—

“Soon shall I wear scarlet,
Because my love is dead.”

He looked at the two blooms and instantly chose the one of the lighter and more violent shade. From the heart of a full-blown rose he drew forth a narrow slip of paper, folded many times. Smoothing it out he read: “Meet me to-morrow evening in Sparrow Hollow at 7.30. —HELEN.” Nothing more. The end was not yet. His heart gave a sigh of relief. “Another day of illusion, thank God. Twenty-four hours in which to imagine and to live.”

A sound of singing came down the glade; the tripping step of two persons approaching; a whispered good-bye; and the approaching footfall of one. There was a knocking at the cottage door. Thrusting the note into his pocket, he began to ascend the path. The visitor had caught the sound of his movement, and came to meet him. There was a flashing of white, a scattering of perfume, and he recognized Mary. She was still singing, breaking off now and then in the midst of a phrase to talk and laugh secretly with herself.

In her long, loose hair were wild-flowers, and flowers in her hands. When she had come up to where he had halted awaiting her, he stretched out his hand to touch her; but she eluded him, crying out words which seemed half a song, “No kiss for errant lovers, but wild-flowers for me.”

There was something so strange and unaccustomed in her appearance that Gabriel strove to draw nearer, that he might look into her eyes; at every fresh advance she ran farther away, laughing quietly.

“Mary,” he cried out sternly, being a little frightened, “come here and tell me what this means.”

If she heard him, she paid not the slightest heed ; but, threading her way between the bushes, plucked fresh flowers, adding them to those which she already carried. Coming down along the track which Gabriel had just ascended, she approached the rose from which he had drawn forth the note ; she stretched out her hand to gather it, but drew back quickly with a short, sharp cry, dropping her garlands.

This gave Gabriel an opportunity to come up with her.

“What is the matter ?” he asked concernedly, seeing how pale she had become.

“That rose,” she gasped ; “it has hurt me.”

Taking her hand in his, he examined it and found the long, jagged wound of a thorn. “I don’t think it is very much,” he said. “Come into the house with me, and I’ll dress and bind it up for you.”

All the madness of her coming had departed ; passive as one in a trance, she let him take her arm and allowed herself to be led toward the cottage.

The misfortune proved to be nothing worse than a deep scratch, which was soon attended to.

“Is that better ?” he asked.

“Yes, I think so,” she replied ; yet there was the dazed look in her eyes of one not fully awakened.

Thinking that a rest might do her good, he carried her over to the couch, and stretched her upon it. Her eyes closed ; her breathing became more even, and she dozed off to sleep.

Gabriel knew not what to make of the situation ; that there was something unhealthy about it he was certain. Moreover, who was it who had accompanied her to the gate ? During the past months of constant intimacy he had seen Mary under many moods ; but never one such as

this. "It is the sudden excitement," he told himself. "When she has slept it off she will be well again." Yet the comfort did not satisfy. Hour after hour she slept, her head nestled close against his shoulder, her breath fanning his cheeks. The moon and stars sailed out across the narrow sea of window-pane, like an old-time galleon with her attendant fleet. Still she slept.

Somewhere between dreaming and waking, in the utter quiet of the night, he began to realize the recent course of events, his brain beating, beating. He had been living upon Helen's charity, and had not known it. She had been loving him all the while, and once again he had betrayed her. Dan must have known a good deal of Helen's affairs from the beginning—at all events, had guessed at her love, if he had not been told of it in so many words. He must have been keeping Helen informed during the past months of silence concerning doings at Wildwood—all save those which concerned Mary. Helen, having learnt through his agency that the book drew near completion, had come down from London, as Rupert had said, that she might be near him, and afterwards with him upon the earliest occasion.

This accounted for Dan's hostility to the engagement with Mary. He had known from the first that there could be no love; he also knew on whom the true love was centred. Seeing that he could not check the march of misfortune, he had taken the desperate step of appealing to Helen. And how much did Helen know? Well, that would be discovered to-morrow. "But how should I act?" Gabriel asked himself.

Looking down on the face of the girl sleeping in his arms, remembering her trust in him and her manifold handicaps, he felt that to retract was impossible. "What I have begun, I must finish," he said. Then came the ever-present question, "But what of Helen?" To one or other

of these two women he must behave brutally ; which could bear it best ?

He thought of Helen as he had seen her that afternoon, habited, mounted, holding a strong horse in check, her cheeks flushed with exertion, her body poised and graceful—a picture of womanliness and of womanly strength. Such beauty as hers could comfort its possessor anywhere, and, when the beauty had perished with years, wealth would do the rest.

He gazed down at the child-girl in his arms. Thought of her past with its limitations ; the baseness of her birth ; the hidden tragedy of the two lives from which hers had sprung ; the strange, patiently endured loneliness of her young days ; and the gladness which had come with his coming. Regarding her thus in the shadowy light, a great flood of manly tenderness for her unprotectedness overwhelmed him, causing him to fold her yet closer.

Now that he studied the features of this phantom friend, he saw that hers was not the face of one who outlives disappointment ; capacity for meekness was there, and ability to suffer physical agony, but not the agony of the heart. The modelling of the face was brave ; in a simple way even heroic ; but it was too fragile and sensitive for the pains of love. Foreshadowings of future happenings, should he abandon or even disillusion her as to the real state of his affections, crept across the walls of his prognostic memory, limning out strange images of terror and decay—filling him with dread.

Contrasting the countenances of these two women, he was passionately aware which of the two was by him the greatlier beloved ; but he also recognized which had most need of him, and which demanded his more ardent pity. Despite all apparent faithlessness and ingratitude to Helen, he felt that to desert Mary would be to invent for himself a vampire of remorse—an omnipresent evil to dog his

darkest hours ; to drag him down ; to exhaust his soul. Thus determined, yet struggling with regret, he drowsed off into an unhappy sleep, to be awakened by a movement at his side. Opening his beclouded eyes, he saw indistinctly the figure of Mary, just risen, standing beside him, bending over his body to kiss his forehead, a forlorn despair around her lips. While in mid act she halted, and turned toward the window, her face relaxing and breaking into an unmeaning smile. There in the wan light, gazing through the lattice with beckoning hand, Gabriel discerned a likeness to himself, but wilder and more elfin. The long hair which hung about the apparition's shoulders was of any shade, from flaxen to bronze, as it shifted and fell. The dress worn was of a vivid forest colour. There he recognized the mysterious boy in green, the Tony whom Mary had so frequently and realistically described. Gabriel reached up his arms to draw her back to him, but was too late. She had slipped to the door and gone outside. He rose and followed, rushed into the garden, where a grey dawn was breaking ; looked around and listened. Far away among the vanishing tree-trunks, he caught the echo of a subdued singing, the tripping step of two people growing less and less, and the secret laughter of two voices.

Wildly he essayed to follow, running abroad in the forest ; listening, pursuing, stealing stealthily from tree to tree ; until at last, in the abandonment of his sorrow, he cried her name aloud. Nothing answered, no leaf stirred.

Utterly wearied, he flung himself down beneath the shadow of a giant fir, for the while submerging his pains, with those of all the woodland world, in the oblivion of sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

PUTTING HIS HAND TO THE PLOUGH

SPARROW HOLLOW, the place of meeting appointed by Helen in her note, lay to the right of Gabriel's cottage, between it and the river. A miniature valley, running back some hundred yards into the hillside, fifty yards wide at its broadest point, shut in on every side by a dense growth of oak and pine, save where it sloped down to the Whither, it afforded every privacy to such as sought to be alone.

Across its level was unrolled a carpet of bracken, fox-glove, orchid and short green grass, whilst in its midst towered a giant beech. Here, tradition stated, King Arthur's knights had met in tournament and joust. Here Merlin had walked; and here, beneath the beech-tree according to some, lay half his magic buried.

By reason of its legendary character it was little frequented by the superstitious peasants; a sanctuary of folklore and fable, it was avoided by all who passed by especially after nightfall. Probably it was a knowledge of this, and the consequent seclusion which it afforded, which had prompted Helen to select it as a suitable place for their purpose.

To Gabriel the valley was known of old; it had been one of his and Mary's favourite haunts for many months, and for the same reason which had led Helen to choose it. Here they had sat together through many a long spring

day, talking, dreaming, reading, or writing as the spirit urged. Falling back upon the most primitive of all pleasures, they had whiled away hour after hour, telling impromptu tales, fearsome, tender, terrible, or ghostly as the case might be, according to their mood, with a noble disregard to time or probability. Mary, in her narrations, had manifested a baffling proneness to the occult. So dramatic at times were her recitals that they thrilled with a sincerity which seemed nothing short of self-revelation. In her stories, trees, flowers, brooks, every created thing, spoke with a living voice; nature was vocal with unseen presences of good and evil. In the number of these inventions Gabriel had been wont to reckon the Green Boy fiction; the first story which Mary had ever told him.

Nevertheless, whensoever he had questioned her, she had manifested a shyness and care to avoid the topic, which seemed to denote something more actual than romance.

When he awakened next morning, under the fir-tree beneath which he had cast himself down on the previous night, and recollected recent happenings, all these other memories took on a new proportion. He tried to tell himself that the face at the window had been nothing but an evil dream, and that he had wandered from the cottage in his sleep. Despite all that he might say, there was still the odd attitude of Mary's arrival, and the fact that he had undoubtedly heard two people approach the gate, to be accounted for. "I can soon decide it," he told himself, "by going down to the cottage and seeing if Mary is still there. I shall probably find her awaiting me with breakfast already prepared."

Picking himself up, he set off at a trot through the fern and bush, until he came in view of the house. The smoke of a newly-lighted fire was curling against the sky. As he came nearer, he saw a white-clad figure moving up

and down the currant-bushes gathering their fruit. Till now he had not realized the high-strung suspense of his mind; when he saw that all was well he laughed aloud in his relief. Darting through the hedge, he stole up behind her and took her in his arms, gazing steadfastly into her face to make sure that there could be no mistake. It was Mary right enough, but she looked tired and fagged, and did not respond so readily as was her custom to his greeting. He noticed that her dress was torn, as with rapid travelling through brambles, also that she made no inquiry as to where he had been.

“Well, Mary, have you nothing to say?” he asked, relaxing his embrace, and holding her out at arm’s length to look into her eyes.

Making an effort to arouse herself she caught his hand, kissing it passionately, saying in a low voice, “Yes, Gabriel, I am glad to see you. I feared that I should never see you again.”

“You little stupid,” he cried, drawing her to him. “Confess you will never be satisfied till we are married. When shall it be? To-morrow?” He had fixed on the date haphazard.

“Oh, how I wish that it might! then I should be content. I can’t bear this terrible uncertainty. I’m fearful of losing you. If I did, I should surely die.”

“If you feel like that, then, let’s do it to-morrow. We’ll ride into Monbridge to-day and make arrangements with the registrar. Now are you happy?”

“Not quite,” she said, smiling painfully, and nestling her head against his breast. “I shall be to-morrow.”

Gabriel, with his usual ability for sudden, if erratic, decision, had made up his mind on the situation. He saw that, if he delayed and was put much oftener to the ordeal of seeing Helen, his resolution might give way; also that there was no valid reason for postponement, where

it simply meant misery for Mary and anxiety for himself.

For immediate expenses he had the fifty-pound cheque which his father had sent him at the Weeping Woman, and which Lancaster had prevented him from destroying. He had kept it lest any emergency should arise—the emergency had now arisen. He smiled whimsically, recalling the dangerous vicissitudes through which it had passed, picturing his parent's horror could he but witness the expenditure in which his bounty was destined to be consumed—the bringing into the family of an unwelcome daughter-in-law.

This tangible assurance of his affection seemed to set all Mary's doubts at rest. Whatever forebodings the plain language of Meredith, the coming of the Thurms, and that which she had seen or guessed to have transpired in the arbour, had caused to arise in her mind were now most remotely banished. She laughed and sang about her tasks in quite the old way, till Gabriel wondered whether he had imputed to her an intensity of sorrow which had never for a moment existed.

At breakfast all her talk was of the future and the golden days. Herself once joined to him she seemed to fancy every trouble at an end.

"But, Mary dear," he reminded her, "we shall have to work hard, and may not have much to eat."

"What does that matter if we are only happy?" she cried. "I will work in the fields every day, with my back bent, and never feel it, if I only know that I am working for you."

He captured her hands and examined them; wonderfully small hands for a farmer's daughter, altogether too small for a farmer's wife.

"Why, what can such little hands as these do?" he asked, folding and unfolding the fingers the while.

“They can sew for you, and cook for you, and dig your garden for you. They can work till they are broken and raw for you.”

He looked into her face, all aglow with generous emotion, and felt himself to be a very mean animal. Remembering his absence from her of the day before, he unthinkingly asked, “Where did you get to yesterday, Mary?”

Immediately her eyes became misty, and her smiles clouded.

“Don’t speak of yesterday,” she said; “I cannot recall what happened. I thought you did not love me.”

“And what made you think that?” he questioned.

“Oh, don’t ask. I can’t bear to think of it. I want to forget all the yesterdays and to remember only the to-days and to-morrows.”

This was the last mention made of what had occurred. Gabriel, seeing how much any reference to it pained her, refrained from pursuing the subject.

After the breakfast had been cleared away she craved permission to run over to Folly Acre and dress. Gabriel, in the meanwhile, went down to the Silver Horn and hired a trap, the selfsame trap which Meredith had used on his destructive errand of the day previous.

Having harnessed, he drove up to the farm to save her the passage down.

He called her name, and soon she appeared looking very simple and rustic. She was dressed in muslin, a beflowered lavender, her long black hair caught loosely up and gathered under a broad straw hat of village make and fashion.

He could not help contrasting her with the picture of Helen, habited and mounted, bearing in her every appointment the opulence of luxury. Nevertheless, he did his best to stifle the memory.

Noticing that her hand was still bound up he asked her about it. "Is your hand no better?"

"No; I thought that it was, and went to remove the bandage, but it began to bleed, so I had to tie it up again."

"Helen's rose and Mary's hand," he thought. "I hope there is no omen there."

Rattling down into the high-road they swept past Meredith's cottage, and found him standing at his gate. If he guessed their purpose, he said nothing, simply returning their salutation and at once busying himself about the care of his flowers.

This was Gabriel's first visit to Monbridge since his coming to Wildwood; he had been so wrapt up in his work that he had never ventured farther than a few miles' distance from his place of residence. The idea of entering a town filled him with a vague delight, causing his spirits to rise.

Down the long and winding road they swung, till, reaching the valley, the track ran almost parallel with the Whither; the towers and spires of the ancient city drawing ever nearer.

On reaching Monbridge they went to the registrar's and made application for a licence allowing them to be married on the following day. After this they went to the Crown and Heart for lunch. Gabriel was much amused at witnessing Mary's futile efforts to disguise her surprise and embarrassment on this her first visit to any town; for although Monbridge was only four miles distant from Folly Acre, so closely had she been guarded, that she had never travelled thither before.

The gouty waiter at the tavern awed her so much that she persisted in calling him "Sir," despite Gabriel's repeated correction.

"I know it's silly of me," she explained, "but when

he hands me anything in that lordly way I can't prevent myself."

Just as they were on the point of leaving for home it occurred to Gabriel that it might be as well to purchase the ring. Turning the horse's head, he drove back again, and alighted at the county's most important silversmith's, Moneymake and Poundworthy. Handing the reins to a boy, he helped Mary out, and entered.

The shopman stared when the request for a ring was made, conjecturing its purpose and wondering at the dissimilarity in social appearance of the bridal pair.

Gabriel noticed this, and was irritated. The attitude of this insignificant employee was for him the first judgment which the world had passed upon his undertaking. Living in the forest he had lost for the time many of his caste prejudices; the return to a town had revived and re-established these, so that he also began involuntarily to judge himself with other eyes. Once again he stifled the remembrance of his doubts and became engrossed in selecting the token of his new bondage. While so doing he heard two people enter and draw near, about to pass him. At this time he was occupied in fitting a ring upon Mary's hand. With an uneasy feeling of being watched he turned around, and, lifting his eyes, saw Helen regarding him, in company with a fashionably dressed girl, whom he guessed to be Sybil Cartwright.

As he turned, Helen deflected her gaze, pretending not to have seen, and hurried by to the top of the shop, brushing him with her dress as she passed.

For the moment he lost control. "Yes; I think that will do," he heard himself saying to the shopman, in a surging, far-away voice.

"But it's too big, Gabriel; besides, we're in no hurry," Mary expostulated.

"I tell you that one will do," he shouted, so loudly that the two newcomers turned around, startled.

"A very rude man," he heard Sybil Cartwright murmur.

Seizing the ring without wrapping or box, he deposited his money, and, catching Mary by the wrist, hurried her from the shop.

Snatching the reins from the boy, he bundled her into the trap, and, lashing the horse, drove off at top speed until the town was left well behind.

Through the sultry stillness of a summer's afternoon, with smell of new-mown hay, and the occasional reverberation of the sharpening of scythes, they jogged along. The horse, spent by the rapidity of his first pace, and feeling the reins slackened, slowed down by degrees to a lazy trot, a rambling walk, and, at last, finding himself no longer urged, browsed with hanging head along the highway, nozzling the buttercups and daisies.

The occupants of the trap were engrossed in their separate thoughts, arguing out problems, mayhap, or merely probing dejectedly the tragic mysteries of life. Mary, her elbows resting on her knees, her face couched in her hands, gazed straight ahead—a mournful sibyl, awaiting the coming of the Word. Gabriel sat erect, one arm thrown along the back of the seat, his hand tenacious, and eyes downcast.

A shouting ahead roused him from his dreams. A four-horse wain, loaded with hay, was coming down the road, and the wagoner was hailing him to pull to one side. When it was gone by, Mary, who had never altered her position, deliberately said, "Gabriel, you knew those ladies and were ashamed of me."

Truth may be long apprehended before it is acknowledged; the words came to him like the accusing cry of his own soul, yet he strove to expostulate. Mary paid no heed to what he tried to say. "If you are ashamed

of me now," she continued in a monotony of voice, "what will you be when we are married? when you have discovered my faults and I have begun to grow old?"

He told her that there were reasons why he should not recognize the ladies in the shop, reasons that she could not understand, though he should tell her them.

"No, Gabriel, let us be honest. You and I are of two different worlds. God, or whatever is up there, has allowed us to meet and be happy together for a little while, but it was only for a little while—that little while is now at an end."

"Never!" exclaimed Gabriel, with the needless over-emphasis of a man telling a lie.

"It is useless to deny," she said. "You say you did not want to recognize her; yet, since you talked with her yesterday, why not to-day, unless it was on my account? She is a great lady, and I—only a village girl."

"Nevertheless, I am going to marry you," said he.

"We have been very glad together," she continued, "too glad—it could not last. You have had your signs and I have had mine—soon it must end."

"What signs?" he asked.

"Your sign came yesterday in the call from the outside world, from which you had fled, and mine——"

"Yes, and yours?"

"I think you saw him last night."

"Saw what?"

"The Green Boy. While I thought you loved me he did not come, and I was glad. When I discovered that I had been mistaken he came again—and now I know."

"But this is a stupidity unworthy of you," he burst out.

"It may be all that," she responded quietly; "nevertheless it is I, and I am my life."

"I'll convince you that you are mistaken to-morrow,

when I marry you," he laughed, feigning a merriment which he was far from feeling.

"Gabriel, you shall never marry me unless you swear that you love me as a husband should." She turned and faced him.

For her sake he braced himself for the heroic falsehood.

"By God and His saints, and by my hope of salvation, I love you as a husband should."

She looked at him for a while incredulously, dumfounded by his unexpected vehemence; wrinkles faded out, the face brightened; holding out her hand she said, "I believe you. I will go with you wherever you choose."

Despite this new-pledged promise, the cloud of what had gone before overshadowed them, so that they found little to say for the rest of the journey.

On arriving in Wildwood Gabriel pulled up at the post-office to receive his mail. There was a letter and a telegram. The letter was from his publisher, brief and to the point, acknowledging the receipt of his manuscript and promising to give it his immediate consideration. The telegram was from Hilda, and ran as follows—

"Come at once. John dangerously ill—asks for you repeatedly—not expected to live.—HILDA."

He handed it to Mary, saying, "Read that." She took it from him, turning it over and over meaninglessly. Then he remembered that she could not read; so, taking it from her, spoke out to her its contents.

"That means that you must go to-night?" she asked.

He thought awhile, and recollecting his engagement with Helen, answered, "No. Not to-night. To-morrow."

"Shall we be married before you go?" she asked.

"There will scarcely be time," he replied. "John is my friend, and I cannot delay."

“Then”—but she paused. She was going to have said, “Then why not start at once?” but the thought of having him with her for one more evening prevented her.

“What were you going to say?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing; it has slipped my memory.”

They left the trap at the inn and clambered up the hill toward Folly Acre. It was now four o'clock. Entering the farm-house they set to work to puff up the fire and get tea ready. This reminded them of their first day, having recalled which they rambled off through a pleasant recapitulation of the happy hours of the past months—of winter, spring, and summer days.

Presently Mary, recalling the mention of John in the telegram, asked Gabriel about him. The private confession which he had written out for his own edification before leaving the Turnpike had finished thus, “The worst thing that I can do is to think badly of myself, since that will draw down my attention upon my baser self. I must blot out the past few months from my memory, and devote myself to bringing joy into the world—look out of my window instead of in. This may not be so good for my art, but it will be much better for my soul.” He had adhered so rigidly to this resolution that Mary knew next to nothing of his past, nor had Meredith, until the other afternoon. Now that Mary questioned him concerning Lancaster, when his heart was sick with the dread of losing him, his tongue was unloosed.

“Lancaster is the kindest and best fellow that I have ever known,” he said. “When I was quite homeless and deserted last summer he took me in, and housed, and fed me, until I came here. He was at that time the one man who believed in my genius, when every one else had failed. Moreover, he has been good not to me alone but to many poor people off the streets of London. I expect he has been working too hard, sleeping too little, eating too

little for their sakes ; this is what has brought about his illness."

"If you admired him so much how was it that you ever came to leave him ?" she asked.

Gabriel found himself entangled—didn't know what excuse to make. "Well, you see," he explained, "London didn't agree with me, and I couldn't work there."

"But I thought you said you had no money."

"Neither had I—at least not much ; but another friend came forward and provided for me."

"Oh," she murmured, "I see." This bolstering up of her hero by his friends made him seem less grand in her eyes—it flavoured of impotence.

"And what is going to happen now ?"

"I expect to become, if not famous, at any rate sufficiently well off to keep myself by writing."

"I had almost forgotten the book," she said. Then, turning to Gabriel, "If you and I are to be married your friends are to be my friends ?"

"Yes."

"And I ought to love them as much as you do ?"

"Yes."

"Then why can't I go to London with you to-morrow and help to nurse your friend ?"

In a moment there flashed before his eyes the picture of this country girl, in her sunburnt dress, wending the paved streets of London. How curiously and absurdly out of place her figure seemed !

"But he has some one nursing him already—a girl cousin—she who sent me the telegram."

"Couldn't I help her ? She can't attend to him both day and night. I could take the night. I'm quite a good nurse," she added in self-defence ; "I often looked after Mother when she was sick."

"He already has others nursing him besides his cousin."

“Well, but couldn’t I go up with you, in any case, just to be near you? If this had only happened a day or two later I should have been your wife, and should have had to go.”

“I think you had better stay,” he said. “It may not be so serious as we think. I shall come back soon—in a week at most.”

It seemed to Gabriel that the whole world had conspired to drag him from his purpose—the noblest, highest, least selfish, which he had ever entertained. First the stern disapproval of Meredith; then the coming of the Thurms; then the insolent astonishment of the shopman; the surprise visit of Helen herself; the telegram, and, last of all, this persistent appeal of Mary to be taken to a place where she would be so manifestly incongruous, albeit the place where he was most at home. There came the rub. If she was out of place to-day, would she be any the less so to-morrow?

“I don’t believe you want to take me, Gabriel. You would be shamed by me and my country ways, as you have been once already to-day.”

“Why will you persist in saying that, Mary, and accusing my love for you? I tell you I am not ashamed of you, and never will be. Have I not sworn it before God?” The thought that he should ever be ashamed of the woman whom he had married seemed too monstrous; therefore, though he knew it to be true, his honour compelled him to deny.

“Gabriel, dear, we have not spent this day well, nor was yesterday any better spent. We have had too much of arguing and too little of love. Let us try to forget that these things have happened, and spend the rest of the evening quietly, and trustfully, like those others which have gone before.”

It was now nearly seven o’clock, as Gabriel could see by

the downward slant of the sun. Sparrow Hollow was a twenty minutes' walk distant, so there could be little time for delay.

"I did not tell you, dearest, because I was afraid of grieving you, that I have an engagement to keep which I cannot postpone."

"An engagement on this our last night?"

"I did not know when I made it that it was to be our last night—the telegram did not come until this afternoon, you remember. After all, there is nothing to be so tragic about, we have all the other evenings before us to be together in, and the days."

"Is it Dan that you are going to meet?"

"I cannot tell you, dear."

"I don't see who else it can be. He is the only man that you really know in Wildwood. Be kind to poor old Dan, won't you, Gabriel?"

"Yes; I will be kind."

Perhaps it was something in the way in which he uttered the words which caused her to guess her mistake.

"If it is not Dan, who can it be?" she questioned.

"Mary, dear, this is the last secret that I shall ever keep from you; at present it is not mine to give away. Soon we shall be married, and then you shall know me all in all, and I you. Now you must be content to wait."

"Her hands fell to her side, her body went limp, a haunted look of foreboding came into her eyes—the fixed gaze of a thing pursued which knows that its strength is exhausted, and that there is no escape—the forlorn despair which he had seen on her dream-face of the previous night returned to her lips, blanching them white.

"Very well," she murmured.

"I shall see you again before I go, either to-night or to-morrow morning," he said. "Why, don't look so woe-

begone ! I promise you I'll come again to-night. There, are you happy now ? ”

As he bent down to kiss her face at parting he took her hand in his, but she, flinching painfully, drew it back.

“ I'm sorry ; I forgot that your hand was wounded,” he said.

So he kissed her, wondering at her silence, and went his way.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MEETING IN SPARROW HOLLOW

MANY questions flashed through his mind as he journeyed to the place of meeting; for the most part they fled unanswered.

What was it that Helen desired to say? Had she been a smaller woman, the guess would have been easy—to taunt and revile him; that was not Helen's way. He recalled his three latest meetings with her; each at night or about nightfall, each displaying some new grandeur in her character.

The night by the Thames, when she had sung to him, had revealed her capacity for sacrifice—the martyr nobility of her womanhood.

The night in London, when the music had ceased, had shown to him her magnanimity—her power to forgive, and in the act of forgiving, to plan by stealth rewards for the forgiven.

The evening at his cottage of the yesternight had manifested her restraint of silence—her fortitude in enduring unexplained pain.

He began to see that most of his lessons of the past year had been learnt through her direct or indirect agency; that her care, often unseen, for the most part, unthanked, had persistently followed him through all his emotional travellings until now, as he thought of it, her love seemed to bind and carry him forward as on wings of Fate.

He had striven to escape her affection as most men strive to escape death; yet what a gift was this that she had offered him! Well, well, it was now too late to speculate on Love's values; he had chosen another kind of love, which consisted not in the fulfilment but the abandonment of itself. "To be like Christ, to be like Christ," he kept whispering to himself as he advanced. Yet, was there anything peculiarly inconsistent with Christlikeness in cleaving to the woman whom he loved? "It is too late to ask such questions," he replied sternly. "There is no choice—only to go on." But what of the long and dreary years, the days of hand toil, and nights of foot weariness? "The man who does what he thinks is right, though it be ever so wrong, has gained a sure ground," he encouraged himself. What if he suspect that it is wrong before ever he undertakes it? "Be silent," he cried, and quickened his pace.

To refight the old battles was his inherent folly—it wasted strength and gained nothing. He knew this, therefore from henceforth he was intent upon conserving this strength, taking short views of his future, and going steadfastly on. Like the warning toll of a bell, the words which his father had spoken rang through and through his brain, never halting, never slackening, "Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

"For God's sake, cease!" he cried passionately, as to some neighbouring presence. "Leave me to do that which I think to be Godlike, though it be black as hell."

Amidst all this confusion of tongues he saw the forlorn despair of the lips of her whom he had just left, and knew, beyond all argument, that to make her happy, in whatsoever way, was a thing worthy in itself.

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Launching out from the path which he had been treading, he followed along the river-side for a little way, and, coming to a bend where the bank grew less steep, knelt down to lave his face in the rush of waters. Refreshed, he hurried on till he came to an opening in the trees, through which Sparrow Hollow lay.

Instead of entering by the direct route he bore off a little to the right, slowing his steps, and following round through the underbrush to see whether Helen had yet arrived.

There, beneath the central beech, with the reins of her tall sorrel trailing from her hand, wearing the green habit of the previous day, and slashing impatiently with her whip, she stood—a dream figure in a hollow of dreams, the ghost woman of the Friuli.

As he watched her he knew that she must ever be for him the most adorable of women. The hot blood of youth surged through his veins, causing his heart to stagger and his head to grow dizzy. The earth of his body joined with the sob of the spirit in crying out, “How shall we leave her?” The passionate, timeless freedom of an immemorial forest bade him run toward her and claim her for his own—this forest which had seen so many lovers mate and die. “Life is short, life is short,” sang the waters of the river; “we have lived long, therefore we know. We flow on; we are gathered up; we are swept away in clouds into distant lands, rarely to return. We have seen men love; we have seen men die; and this we say to you, ‘Love while you can.’ Life is so short; there is nothing but love.”

A blackbird in a neighbouring tree had contrived the selfsame message. “Love, love, love,” he piped in a shrill imperative; “love while you can; there is nothing but love, love, love.”

If Merlin’s magic had awakened and thundered down

the grove no temptation of his could have been more great. High above the roar and rush of a tidal heart, penetrating the sensuous infatuations of an unbridled emotion, rang out the clarion call of duty, "To be as Christ was ; to die for others ; that is the goal."

Slowly, with laggard feet, while the battle was yet waging and undecided, he began to advance. The leaves turning under his tread caused Helen to look up—except for this she did not move. When he came where she was he gripped her steadying hand ; after which they seated themselves beneath the beech.

"Perhaps I should not have asked you to come," she said ; "and yet I could hardly help it. I have tried all along to be your friend, and it seemed to me that there were still a few things left that I might do." She paused and looked at him. He did not reply. "You are going to be married shortly ; your wife will be very young ; I should like to make things easier for her."

"Helen, you know this ?" Gabriel was flushed, his eyes were over-bright ; he had grasped with telepathic instance the import of her words.

"Why not ?" she asked, with a faint smile. "Meredith has told me everything ; he wanted me to dissuade you, but I think that you have done well."

"*You* think so, Helen ? *You*, of all people ?" He searched for sarcasm in her voice, but there was none. The only explanation which could fall into line with facts was that she had ceased to care for him, and was therefore glad to see him settled. The thought that this should be, though best for all concerned, stabbed him with the flame-pain of a sword.

"Why should I not think so ? Without you she is defenceless ; without her you would become selfish. If this should happen you would lose your power to sing."

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“My power to sing!” he cried; “what is that? I do not love her, I tell you—at least, not in that way—not as I love you.”

It was Helen’s turn to express surprise. Then, seeing the ordeal of agony through which he was passing, and guessing that there was yet some hidden knowledge, she said more tenderly—

“Come, Gabriel, if it will help you tell me all. This time it is I who invite you to confess.”

The joy of self-derision came upon him. Beginning from the night that he had spent with her on the Thames, he told fiercely and scathingly, frankly and without omission, all that had happened to him, down to the last scene in Folly Acre. Of what his sin of action toward Lancaster had really consisted, and how it had come about. Of how he had come to Wildwood supposing that the Poet was his only benefactor. How he had drifted with blinded eyes, all unwittingly, into allowing Mary, Meredith’s daughter, to love him. How he had discovered her love and her history at one and the same time. How, during his stay in the forest, a gradual change and search after a soul had gone on within his heart, until he had at last come to see that no life was worthy unless it cast the healing shadow of a cross. That the first test of his new belief had come to him in the person of Mary, making a magnificent appeal to his sense of the heroic; and of how he had responded in order that he might atone for the sorrows which he had so heedlessly caused to others.

How, on account of her own silence of those last months, he had come to think that she had forgotten to care for him, being disgusted, as any woman might well be, at what he had told her on the night drive in the Park. That with her coming of yesterday he had found his conjecture to be false, and that, moreover, her love had

been following him all the way, providing with the Poet for his wants at Wildwood. He then explained the meaning of the bonfire and her charred love-letters, and of how he had read her discovery of the same in her face before ever she had left to ride away.

With that sneering barbarity of which men are capable only when they practise surgery upon their own souls, he opened up to her his temptation to withdraw even at this last stage in the game ; of the coward shame which he had felt that day in Monbridge of Mary and her rusticity, and of its sequel. Finally, of the latest development in the news of Lancaster's illness and of the consequent postponement of his marriage with Mary ; of her disappointment, and of his conjectures on the way to the Hollow.

With a mad outburst of dervish frenzy he completed his tirade, hacking long rents in the holy of holies of his buried life ; gashing his sensitiveness with the two-edged sword of embittered sincerity and self-scorn.

"I am a poor, shiftless incompetent," he cried. "When I try to do right I succeed in working lasting wrong. When I plan to avoid a small injury I inadvertently accomplish a greater. I go through the world enlisting friends' sympathy, and dragging them down to my own low level by my gratitude. I have relied upon myself to save myself ; prayed to God to save me ; trusted that others might save me, but all to no avail. I am rotten in myself. I crucify others, but cannot crucify my own body. I am utterly worthless, and utterly untrustworthy."

In this strain he might have proceeded had not Helen laid her hand upon his mouth to stop him.

"You are wrong, wrong, wrong in what you say. You have no right to accuse yourself like this. I, who by your own showing, should have most reason to complain, recognize that you have done honourably and well. I am willing to stand by you and, for all my love of you, to

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help you in sacrificing our love to the happiness of this girl. All your life has tended toward this moment ; you only spoil it by being tragic over it. Leave that to others ; it is for you to smile through your pain, and so to teach the world that heroes can still be brave. In what you have done you have done well—better than you can ever think.”

Dumb and amazed, paralyzed of speech, Gabriel stared at her ; all the velocity was gone out of his words. “ What kind of woman was this,” he asked, “ who could give the last shred of herself for the binding up of the wounds of the man whom she loved—and loved in vain ? Who could stretch out her hands to push him from her while speaking love-words of comfort, that he might have the better hopes of peace ? ” The frivolous cynicisms concerning woman, of his early Oxford days, when he had held her to be so much less than man, fled back upon him, stripped of their external brilliancy, starved and stricken. Here was a wonder which he could not comprehend ; a noble inconsistency which baffled him. Where was Helen the intangible and unattainable ? She had come very near to earth to-night—almost too near for his safety.

“ If Mary feels so strongly about it, Gabriel,” he heard her saying, “ you must marry her to-morrow, as you promised, before you go to London.”

“ But, Helen, why do you urge me to this ? Have you no regrets ? ”

“ So many that I hardly know how to face to-morrow.”

“ Then why, after all, should I do this thing ? Would it be so very wrong in us to go away together ? Is love so poor a trifle and so easily come by that we should despise it ? Let us go away quietly together to some foreign part where we are not known and can live at peace by ourselves.” This nearness to her beauty in the silent woodland hour, where they two were left once again so entirely

together, had disembarrassed him of his resolves; the song of the earth throbbed through his veins—nothing counted save love, love, love.

“Why do I urge you so?” she repeated in a small, thrilling voice. “Because it is best for both of us, Gabriel. We love too intensely; we should burn out our lives—be consumed by our own passion. God never meant a man and a woman to love as we love. He would become jealous; some disaster would overtake us. If I were to tell you what I feel toward you—— But we had best be silent. Such talk could only serve to stifle conscience.”

“But why should we not speak of it? It was given us to speak about.”

“No, Gabriel; it was given to us that we might refuse it.”

“But why? Why? What is the reason for this butchering of that which is best?”

“That it is not best; there is something better—to give to others that which is our best. You have told me of that which you have done, and the conclusion at which you have arrived—that life should be a cross——”

“Yes, but that was before I had discovered that you still cared for me,” Gabriel interrupted.

“Does that make the conclusion any the less true?” she asked. “No, Gabriel, you were right; we must live the Christ-life. Together, that would be impossible; we should care over-much for one another and become selfish. To live this life it is necessary to leave all.”

“Then it is a crime to love? You never said this before.”

“No; but listen. After you went away, I felt the need of you; but I dared not write, lest you should guess who it was that was providing for you. I had promised myself that I would go out of your life, lest calamity should befall you as it befell the Poet, through me. Therefore

I fell into the habit of visiting Mr. Lancaster, who shared my love of you, was the one man who knew you most intimately, and who was in constant correspondence with you. Hour by hour we would talk of you, and, poor comfort though this was, yet it was some comfort when I was very lonely. By and by he began to unfold to me, and to exchange confidences, telling me things about himself. I had noticed whenever I went there that his house was full of disreputable people. You also had told me something about his new manner of life. One day, when I questioned, he told me his desire—to patch up maimed lives; to spend himself for others; to live the life which Christ would have lived, even though he could not believe in Christ. I thought little of it at the time, but afterwards, when I returned home and pondered the vanity of my own living, it came upon me in a flash that he was right—that this was the one attainable ambition left for me. I went down and helped him with his work—became nearly as enthusiastic as he himself. His cousin, Hilda, who is the purest, bravest woman I have met, took me in hand and instructed me; so, whilst you have been living at Wildwood, I have been continually at the Weeping Woman with the outcasts, laying my hands upon them—happy at last.”

“We two have become possessed of this same idea.”

“Yes, Gabriel—that life is a cross, and that they live life best who live most bravely.”

“And that is my discovery also. Oh, Helen, why should we not live our ideal out together?”

“Because you are a poet, and I am a rich girl. You can do your best work in other ways, but mine lies among the poor. Besides, we have each had our call, and they are not the same. You dare not disobey. That which you have planned for your own sake, and for the sake of that other man who failed, you must carry to a finish.

Do you remember what I said to you at parting that night in London? 'I want you, when you are gone, to become more happy, and the best way in which you can do that is by keeping good.' Do not go back upon your promise, Gabriel; do not disappoint me."

"I believe you are right; but the cross is heavy—more heavy than I can bear."

"I saw her with you to-day, Gabriel. I am sure she is worthy of the sacrifice. If you do not love her now, you will learn to some day. Moreover, you owe this; for however she first learnt to love you, the greater share of responsibility must always rest with you."

"Thank God, Helen, that you are so good a woman. If you had been less noble, I should have gone back upon my better self to-night. What is it that you advise me to do? I am in your hands."

"You must marry her to-morrow, as you have promised; that is all."

"I will do it. But when shall I see you again?"

"Not for a long time, I fear. It would be unwise to meet; we could not trust ourselves. You must make it the purpose of your life to make yourself faithful in your thoughts to her, and, to this end, to forget me. After the marriage you will go to London, I suppose, to see poor John, and then return again. The twelve months set aside by your father will soon be up, and you will be able to come to some settlement with him. In the meanwhile, I shall leave the Cartwrights, and go away."

"But shall I never see you again? Shall I never hear from you?"

"Where would be the good? Supposing we did meet or write, we should be as strangers. I should have no part in your life."

"As you will," he replied sadly. "Yet there is still one request which I want to make of you."

“What is that?”

“It is cruel of me to ask it, I know; yet I have a morbid feeling that without it all will not go well. I want you to come with me to-night and tell Mary that you wish her happiness.”

So far there had been nothing but gentleness in her face. She had reasoned with him as a mother with her boy—as one who, while taking a tender interest in his affairs, was only secondarily concerned. Now that she had gained her point, and the good deed had been accomplished, the essential woman leapt out. Flinging her arms about his neck and kissing his lips, “Gabriel, do not ask me,” she cried. “I hate her! My God, how I hate her!”

While she spoke, he heard a sound, and, looking up, perceived that the sunset had died away and the moon was risen. All the hollow was bathed in light. There, not twenty yards away, stood Mary and *that other*, casting two long shadows, and gazing toward the tree. One long look she gave, then, without a word, stole away. When she had vanished with her companion amongst the forest trees, Gabriel spoke. “It is getting late, Helen, and you have far to go.”

“Yes, a long way to go,” she murmured mechanically.

He lifted her on to her horse, not trusting himself to say more, and set out through the woods by a short route, that he might see her safely on the main road.

When they had traversed a little over a mile, they came out on the smooth, white Roman highway, which the legions had tramped to Monbridge.

“Helen, you ought not to travel so far alone by night. Hadn’t you better return with me to Folly Acre?”

“That would only leave me the farther to go to-morrow,” she answered, with a tired smile. “You know that that is far enough already. I told them that I

would spend the night in Monbridge, and Sybil is awaiting me there. You need not trouble."

Nevertheless, he followed her for the space of two miles, until they had reached the outskirts of the grey old city.

"You are a good fellow, Gabriel," she said; "you are tired out, and had better not come farther."

"I could go anywhere with you, and never grow tired," he sighed.

A wild look came into her eyes. He saw it as she towered above him upon her tall horse in the moonlight. Her moral endurance was spent.

Who would blame her if, after having striven to turn the tide for God, she failed; and what did blame or praise matter in either case? The world was wide, so wide; why should it need saviours; and who was she, a weak woman, to try to save it? Old age would soon overtake her; then would be time and to spare for repentance—why should she not take her delight now, while she was young?

The horse pawed the ground and whinnied, a little breeze blew out his mane, speaking of space and a world to wander, bidding them begone together, while the ecstasy remained.

Turning her proud, blanched face toward him, she looked down with eyes which bespoke her thought, stretching out a hand to bid him come.

He read her mind and, remembering how she had saved him from himself that evening, took her hand, and kissed it, saying, "No, Helen, it can never be."

"Not my hand, Gabriel, my face," she cried, bending toward him out of the saddle.

Reaching up and taking her face between his hands, he looked long into the sweet, sad eyes, which he loved; then, putting his lips to her forehead, whispered her own words, "I want you, when you are gone, to become more happy,

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and the best way in which you can do that is by keeping good."

The mouth trembled, and tears filled her eyes; the first of that brave evening. "I will try for your sake, Gabriel," she said. "Forgive me the harsh words which I have spoken; they were not meant. You have proved yourself a true poet to-night."

"And who am I, that I should forgive?" he cried, pressing his hot face against her dress.

"Or I?" she said, resting her hand upon his head. "We have both done our best."

"God bless you," he said.

And she, perceiving that other words were vain, and only tempted to longer delay, gathering up the reins, returned answer, "And may Jesus comfort you."

Urging her horse to a canter, she disappeared down the moonlit road. Gabriel was once more left standing alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

RELUCTANTLY he turned, and commenced the homeward journey. The climax was over and past, he could now view himself and each one of the little group whom he had gathered around him, dispassionately.

This strange fact struck him, that they had all, in their own peculiar way, foregone something. Lancaster and Hilda at the Weeping Woman, Meredith at Wildwood. These, after having fought and lost their battles, when they had suffered defeat in that which they most had coveted, had seen a new and better sort of victory emerging from their own undoing ; with the defeat which was victory, had come peace. A thing yet more significant grew clear to him : that their first battles had been waged wittingly, for themselves and by themselves ; that their defeat had been a personal loss, whereas the after triumph had come unsought, through themselves but for others.

Mary had been a defeated woman from the outset ; she had inherited the shame and undoing of her parents. Love seemed to be for her the only possible conquest ; to persist in love her one heroism. It behoved him, as the stronger of the two, to help in the retrieving of her hereditary losses. Helen was right. He must marry Mary and *will* to be loyal, in spite of himself. This he would do. They two would live the quiet pastoral life, doing their daily task and helping Meredith in his work.

He would teach Mary, and would devote his perseverance to making up to her the deficiencies of her childhood. When he recollected what those deficiencies were, his heart went out to her in something more than compassion; he was already conscious of the birth within him of a new, protecting, different quality of love.

"I will be faithful to her in thought as well as in action," he said. "It was cowardly of me to wince to-day at the opinion of the world. What is the world? An old rake, who conceals his sins by accusing those of others."

Already he was anxious to be near her, to make recompense for past misdeeds, and to feel the forgiveness of her arms about him.

But what of Helen? She had fought the bravest fight of them all. She had fought from the first in order that she might be defeated, for the sake of others. As yet there was no recompense for her. He, who alone knew of her courage, was not permitted even to think of or to pity her in this her darkest hour.

"We have each won something in the end," he consoled himself. "Surely there may yet be some hidden victory for her!" In obedience to her desire he banished her from his thoughts.

During the long and solitary homeward tramp there was plenty of time for cogitation. One phenomenon worried him, because he could not explain it—Mary's hallucination about the Green Boy. He had made inquiry of many people, Meredith included, as to whether any such person inhabited the neighbourhood, and had in all cases, save that of Meredith, been met with a blank stare.

Meredith, on being asked, had looked up at him half-shrewd, half-frightened, answering, "Not that I have ever seen."

Gabriel was convinced that he had seen the mysterious Green Boy again this evening in the Hollow, in the

company of Mary. Revealed by the moonlight he had not only recognized his shadow, but the face and dress which Mary had so often described—the same face, so strangely like his own, which had gazed in through the window on the previous night. The memory made him uncomfortable. It was uncanny. He determined to question Meredith again, that very night.

There was a double reason for his seeing him at that late hour. He was Mary's father, and it was only right that he should be consulted about his daughter's marriage, even though he exercised no authority over her.

On his first discovery that Meredith had been meddling in his affairs, Gabriel had inclined to be angry. Now that everything was arranged, all cause for resentment being past, Gabriel, understanding the delicacy of his predicament, was full of sympathy for him, and readily forgave.

It was past eleven o'clock when he reached Wildwood and turned in at Meredith's gate, but the light was still burning, so he did not hesitate to knock.

Pushing open the cottage door he discovered his host engaged upon the usual task. He had set a lamp before him, in suchwise that, while enabling him to read from his heavy family Bible, it would also act as searchlight to any homeless traveller along the road.

"Still up, Dan," he said, nodding towards him. "I'm glad of that, for I want a talk with you. What is it that you are reading so late at night?"

Dan looked up. "'The story of Jephthah's daughter."

"One that I have never liked," said Gabriel. "It's too brutal. God isn't like that; it can't be true."

"Why not?"

"Because fathers don't make such vows; daughters don't help them to keep them when they are made; and should the worst come to the worst, God Himself would see to it that they were broken."

"Such stories are true, Gabriel. Men have been doing rash deeds and making careless vows, for which their womenfolk have had to suffer, throughout the ages. I am a Jephthah ; I should know."

"You live too much with John Bunyan, Dan, and, like him, take delight in abasing yourself with strained Bible analogies. This time I fail to see the point of contact in your comparison."

"I, like Jephthah, fled from my brethren and dwelt in a distant land, where I gathered vain men unto me. I, like Jephthah, returned after many years to the place of my birth to fight a battle for the Lord. I also have won my battle—and have an only daughter."

"However that may be, there shall be no more tragedies in your edition of the story. I told you, Dan, that I wanted to marry your daughter ; I still intend to do so. I do not blame you for trying to hinder me, for I think I can read your motive ; you wanted to safeguard Helen. I have been with her to-night and she herself has urged me to do this. Now that there is no other hindrance do you agree ?"

"Gabriel, dear lad, I interfered not for Helen alone, but for your own sake. You know how much this marriage has already cost you ; it may ruin your hopes—your life."

"Then I am prepared and glad to be ruined. It is I who shall pay ; it is my own affair."

"Is there nothing that I can say which will dissuade you ?"

"Nothing."

"Gabriel, you are a good man, you know how the secret of my early sin has weighed me down, and how much easier it will be for me to have one near who will share that knowledge. It is not through lack of love for you that I have been unwilling, but because I wished to spare you."

“And I am unwilling to be spared. When I had lost faith, and honour, and religion, you came to me and showed me how life might be lived. I am happier to fail in your company, through a kindly deed, than to succeed in a fashion that would leave me cause for regret.”

Meredith bent over him and kissed him, saying, “The hate of the Lord is removed from me at last. He denied me a daughter ; He has given me a son.”

Thereupon Gabriel told him his plans, how he was to be married on the morning following, and purposed living at Folly Acre.

“There is one question,” said he, “which I have been puzzled in answering. I asked you about it once, and, although you refused to answer, you seemed to me to know.”

“What is that ?”

“It is concerning that tale of Mary’s about the Green Boy, whoever he may be. She described him to me for the first time on Christmas Day, and lately she has made reference to him on several occasions.”

Meredith’s eyes had become anxious. “Tell me all you know,” he said, “and I will answer you.”

Then Gabriel told him of what he himself had seen that very night, and the night previous ; also, how Mary had said that the Green Boy had told her secrets and given her warnings concerning their love. Directly he had finished, Meredith began feverishly, hurrying out his words—

“There are things that are held for true in our forest which you people in London would laugh to scorn—things which I myself do not like to believe, but which I know to have happened. Many of the families which live in our villages have been here, and in the same houses, from father to son as far back as they can remember, therefore much history and legend had gathered around names.

“The Devons are one of these. Spiritual presences are said to have come to such, as warnings of evil in times of

crises, before the happening of great events in their houses. With some the form of the warning has differed at different times, with others it has been always the same.

"The Devons have lived up there on the hill for hundreds of years. To them the manifestation has always been the same in form and figure, only the face has changed; the face has been that of the person through whom the danger threatened. It has invariably appeared when disaster is at hand. The Green Boy was seen before James Devon marched away to Naseby to die, and before Nathaniel was taken for sheep stealing. Dora saw him before I ruined her, and the face which he wore was mine. Mary has seen him off and on all her life—she is the last of the Devons. This was why her mother was so much terrified whenever she mentioned having been with him as a child. It was this which made me so silent when you questioned me, and partly this which made me so averse to your marriage."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Gabriel, striving to keep down his fear. "Last night I saw his face at the window distinctly, and to-night I saw him in the Hollow."

"It means," said Meredith slowly, "it means that Mary is in danger. Tell me, were you alone when they met you this evening?"

"No; I was with Helen."

"Did Miss Thurm see them?"

"No; her face was turned away."

"Gabriel, we must go to Folly Acre to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes, and at once."

"But she will be asleep."

"Nevertheless, we must go."

There was so much of horror in Meredith's voice that Gabriel found his mood contagious. Turning down the lamp they hurried out into the night.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TERROR BY NIGHT

A DRIZZLING rain was falling, through which the moon shone blurred. There was the sigh of a rustling unrest in the forest, as of tired trees tossing uneasily in sleep, whispering incoherent warnings, though no breeze blew. The atmosphere sagged limp and heavy across the valley—a damp sheet, hung from the hill-tops, shutting out the air—so that one's breath came painfully.

Striking the main road, Gabriel lent the older man his arm. There was comfort on such a night in mere contact of flesh with flesh, which made him less afraid.

“Do you think that this is necessary?” hazarded Gabriel, silence becoming oppressive.

“Jephthah's daughter, she is Jephthah's daughter,” was the only response.

Arriving at a point where the by-path broke away beneath boughs to Folly Acre, they plunged into the blackness which underlay the woods.

Here it was necessary to go singly on account of overhanging branches.

Despite his infirmity Meredith pushed ahead, hurrying the pace, so that it was difficult at times for Gabriel to keep up with him. Ever and again dripping foliage would tap against his face with the cold touch of a dead hand, causing him to start back with an involuntary cry.

Sometimes when Meredith halted to discover the way

Gabriel would go by him, brushing him in the passing, and would shudder, fancying a third presence. When through the trees the solemn castellations of the old farm loomed up ahead they broke into a run, with a sigh of relief that it still stood.

In the gloom and nightmare of the hour everything had become possible, so present had been the shadow of their dread.

Pushing open the creaking gate they hurried up the weed-grown walk, working round toward the back of the house.

No light burned ; everything was silent. They hesitated, peering in through the window, questioning whether they should enter and awaken her. The night was too black to see anything, and the panes were mist bedrenched.

Meredith timidly knocked upon the door. Receiving no answer he knocked again, louder and louder, till the whole house echoed with his violence.

“Why doesn’t she answer?” Gabriel whispered tremulously.

Meredith answered nothing, but, forcing the latch, entered.

Groping their way toward the bed they smoothed their hands across pillow and counterpane ; they were unruffled—she had not slept there.

Horror giving place to alarm, they searched the room, thinking that she might have fainted, or fallen asleep in one of the chairs—all were empty.

Striking matches, and going upon their knees, they crept across the paved floor, but found no trace of her.

“Can it be that she has moved into some other part of the house?” Gabriel suggested in desperation.

Seizing the hope they rushed to examine the door, but found it locked on their own side, proving the supposition false. Meredith, going out into the night, called to Gabriel, saying—

“Come away. She is not here. We must look elsewhere for her.”

He did not follow. His eyes had grown more accustomed to the dark ; something had riveted his attention. Meredith, hearing that he did not come, re-entered the house to find him standing at the far end of the room, gazing up.

Fixing his eyes in the same direction to where the minstrel gallery ran to and fro from wall to wall, he saw a white thing, above the bed, hanging. For a minute he too stood, gazing, paralyzed of action, till, in the darkness, the shadow of white seemed to swing and sway. Then, shaking Gabriel by the arm, he shouted—

“Come, Gabriel, quickly. It may not be too late.”

Running toward the ladder which led up he began to ascend the steps. Fastened to the balustrade he found a cord, which he tore at with his fingers to unloose.

Gabriel, aroused, and apprehending the worst, climbed on to the bed, and held up the body in his arms, releasing the weight.

By slow degrees it slipped toward him as Meredith undid the knot, till the head fell back across his shoulder, and the long black hair travelled his face.

They laid her down upon the bed, and relieved the tension around the throat. She was already chill.

Discovering the lamp they found that its oil was exhausted, the wick charred ; it also had burned itself out. Having searched for materials they lit a fire. This Meredith did while Gabriel watched beside the bed.

When the flames had sprung up and licked the wood they revealed that which it was not well for any who had loved her to see. She was beyond their aid. Drawing the sheet across the face Meredith led Gabriel away, seating him beside the hearth. Obedient and dazed he did that which he was commanded, sitting quietly, with eyes

fixed and expressionless—almost as awful as those of that dead face into which he had glanced.

Meredith, returning to the bedside, having straightened out the body and composed the features, taking the dead girl's hand in his, began to pray. The first words were inaudible—not to be distinguished from the patter of the rain. As the father's heart within him awoke to its grief, speech grew in volume, torrentuous, tottering, passionate, broken with the utterances of a twisted, tortured soul. The sound of his voice rose and fell, now full and swelling like the tones of a deep bronze bell, now hushed and sad with the secrecy of whispered sibilants.

In the night he was pleading with his God for her, for Gabriel, for himself, that He might hold out His father-hand to each, to the living as to the dead, and guide their footsteps into His way of peace. Nothing of rebuke marred the petition, no idleness of reviling words was there, only the proven faith of one, who, scarce knowing his own self, stands steadfast and unamazed at finding the mind of his Maker unknowable.

When the first agony had worked itself out he arose, and taking his seat beside Gabriel, drew from his pocket a well-thumbed Bible, from which he commenced to read his favourite passages aloud, running his finger along the lines that he might decipher the words. The embers flickered and flared, so that at times he could scarcely see; still he read on.

With him this end had been in a vague way long expected. It fitted in with his theology of life—theology or reverent superstition.

That Jephthah's daughter should die because of the victory, that children should inherit the curse of a father's sin, were to him the natural concomitants of victory and of the commission of sin.

Religion to him was Life;—God working through lives

to-day, yesterday, and for ever, unchanging and unchanged, harsh as the God of the Hebrews. Religion was an inviolable automatic law, marshalling and restraining life; God the great jurist—just, generous, but legal. Meredith had so regulated his record by Old Testament teachings that he saw no injustice or cause for resentment in the striking down of the fruit of his own sin by the same Divine hand which had similarly bereaved Jephthah, Eli, and David. Retribution in one shape or another he had long feared. He bowed resignedly to the inevitable mandate of a jealous God, recognizing upon it the handwriting of his own past crime.

With Gabriel affairs were far otherwise. He saw only the blind, brutal display of an Omnipotence which strung arrows at a venture, behind clouds, carelessly, and laughed. All the long train of events, leading up to this one event, passed before his eyes mockingly, proving either no God at all or a frivolous wanton.

He saw himself of a year ago, as in some dim age, setting out with high hopes and an initial sacrifice upon his high road of helpfulness—his one idea to accomplish himself at all costs, for the sake of fame and of others.

Like the minor undertones of a great Greek tragedy, one miserable calamity after another had crept in, false guides, promising to hasten him to the goal of his ambitions; posing as skilful musicians of emotion who would call forth from the harp of his heart the new songs. Thus the progression of his downfall sped on, till he, whose every thought along the way had been kindness, found himself at the end with blood-red hands, splashed with the blood of many, all of them people whom he had loved, standing alone, an outcast in the eyes of the world, a criminal in his own.

With vehement petulance he blamed himself for lapses of kindness, absences of forethought, omissions of gentle-

ness ; and, even while he did so, pitied and extenuated. The bitterest memory of all was that she whom he had loved amongst women better than all, save one, and for whom, above every living creature, he had been willing to forego himself the most, had died misunderstanding him, condemning him perhaps ; or, what was worse, condemning herself.

When he thought of the horror of self-loathing which must have led to this last act of her denial, he was possessed with a madness of remorse ; still more so when he pictured how his each least responsible action had contributed to the catastrophe, and must unavoidably, in the final summing, be held responsible.

Doubtless he had revealed to her in various indirect ways—direct enough to her—that he could not return the fire of love which she gave.

The coming of the Thurms had strengthened her suspicions. His own conduct at Monbridge had lent them colour. The telegram, herald of his own immediate departure, had combined them, causing him to appear in her eyes as a puling coward, who, not daring to speak out the truth to her openly, had contrived this roundabout means of exit—a lie. She could not read the message for herself, and had probably thought it all made up. That which she had seen in Sparrow Hollow had confirmed every hasty guess ; made it real ; lent it life, impelling her to her final deed of desperate self-contempt.

His good and his bad had been alike misconstrued, through no fault of his own, certainly through none of hers, till this horrid climax had been reached, when, sick and disillusioned, she, by whom the world had never set store, owning herself to be dispensable, had compassed her own annihilation.

“What is there left for me to accomplish?” his soul cried out within him. “Such things as I would not,

those I do; the things that I would, I have not the capacity to attain. I am a curse and a plague-spot wherever I go—a vampire who thrives on the lives of others and cannot himself die.” He thought of how he had pledged himself to be the healing shadow of a cross, and of all the dreams which had come with the desire. From such a life he felt himself to be for ever debarred; how should hands which had slain ever be lifted up to bless?

“Oh, Christ, that you were real!” he cried in the silence of his agony; “you, at least, would understand.” So, between his lonely longing for a Saviour, many years dead, and his memory of her glazed eyes, he eddied and swayed.

Patiently, through the watches of the night, in low, broken tones, the other man read on until at last he came to the words, “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night.” Here he paused, having arrived at that for which he had sought. Gabriel, wakening out of his trance, listened. “Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night; nor for the arrow which flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor the destruction that wasteth at noonday.”

The reader halted, with his finger on the page, and, looking up, met the eyes of Gabriel full upon him. “That is what we have feared: the terror by night; the pestilence that walketh by darkness. These words were written that we might not be afraid.”

In his despair, Gabriel fancied he saw some phantom of comfort in what had been spoken; as a drowning man flings out hands above the waters to clutch at the drifting semblance of a hope, he snatched the book from Meredith’s hands, and, throwing himself down upon his knees by the fire, that he might catch the flickering light, so near that the heat scorched his face and well-nigh singed

his hair, he read, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say unto the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night."

Like the music of an old song, or the far-away memory of a dear friend's voice, the calm of the words stole over him. This was the kind of God he had been in search of all these years, a Being who mingled boundless strength with the finite mother-love—One Who could cover him with the feathers of tenderness and shelter him beneath the wings of a timeless security, making him unafraid.

In a dim way he began to contrast the composure of Meredith's fortitude with his own resistless surrender to misfortune. Here was one who knew himself to be defended from the power of every adversary; while he, Gabriel, had been trusting in the weakling force of his own right arm alone. Oh, that he also might feel the touch of the feathers, and quietly creep in beneath the shadow of the outspread wings!

Meredith, with the delicate instinct of the divinely consecrated, of one who had gone through the same fiery ordeal himself, looked on without speaking, until Gabriel, rising towards him, returned the book, and laid his hand upon the old man's knee, crouching beside him.

"Has it come at last, laddie?"

Gabriel lifted to him a face radiant and smiling. "It has come," he said; "tell me more about it."

In a quavering monotone, Meredith, his hands resting in the boy's long, tangled curls, repeated, "Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go

was fenced on either side with a wall, and that the wall was called Salvation. Up this, therefore, Christian did run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that, just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosened from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more."

"I have seen that cross," whispered Gabriel, "and now I have come to it. I have also stood within the sepulchre."

For a while they remained without speech, each fulfilled with his own thoughts.

"And then?" asked Gabriel; "what did Christian do next?"

"Then," continued Meredith, "then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.' Then he stood still a while to look and wonder."

"Did nothing else happen?"

"Yes, as he stood looking, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with, 'Peace be unto thee.' So the first one said to him, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee;' and the second stripped him of his rags; the third set a mark upon his forehead, and gave him a roll, with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate; so they went their way."

"I like what the first one said best."

"I also loved his words best at the time, I remember; but, afterwards, I came to love them all," said Meredith, bending over his face.

"Dan, I am so tired, I should like to sleep, but I would rather kiss her first."

Going hand in hand toward the bed, Meredith turned back the sheet so far as her forehead.

“Dan, I think she is happy; I am sure she must be smiling. They will love her better there.”

“Yes; she has departed and is with Christ, which is far better.”

So, when the terror by night had been overcome, these two men, folded within each other's arms, stretched on the floor by the dead girl's side, slept till the breaking of new day.

CHAPTER XXX

THE COMING OF THE UNENLIGHTENED

A NORTH wind swept the countryside, strumming from the forest branches a low, sustained music, as from the chords of a many-stringed harp ; rousing hoarse cheers as it pelted through the valley ; causing flower-faces of the field to bow this way and that, like royalty riding through a park. The sun, blustering and brimful of glory, was splashing his turbulent way through a racing cloud toward the zenith of his height—a horse of gold in the surf of an azure sea.

The world was electric with energy. Everything was *doing* ; birds flying hither and thither ; wains along distant high-roads rumbling citywards ; brooks babbling on to a river ; rivers bawling down to a sea ; seas swaying on to an ocean. Life was throbbing and travelling.

Gabriel took a last farewell look at his cottage home, and pulled to the door. Withdrawing the key from the lock, he placed it on a corner of the window-sill, according to agreement with Meredith.

That morning they had talked matters over, and had come to the conclusion that it was Gabriel's bounden duty to hasten to London ; the message in the telegram had been urgent and allowed of no delay.

This left Meredith in charge of affairs at Folly Acre ; also to face any trouble that might arise. Gabriel had objected to the arrangement, till Meredith had pointed

out to him that his place was at the Turnpike, and that there was no sense in two being involved in an unpleasantness which was better handled by one. Moreover, his absence might avoid a scandal which would drag many names into the unsympathetic light of publicity—Helen's, for instance. From every point of view it seemed expedient that he should go.

Meredith relied upon the influence of Sir Danver Cartwright, and had sent for him early that morning. If an inquest should be made compulsory, the name of Gabriel was to be omitted, Meredith being alone mentioned as the discoverer of the suicide; its motive being left conjectural. His well-known lofty character, together with the secret support of one of the county's highest magnates, would prohibit any suspicion of foul play attaching to him.

The secluded life which had been led, both at Folly Acre and the cottage, gave no opportunity for the introduction of village witnesses. There was no one who could contribute any information over and above what was generally known, except Meredith. There were powerful reasons for expecting that the tragedy could be kept private, as is frequently the case in obscure villages; some ignorant or friendly doctor, of Sir Danver's procuring, being persuaded to fill in a certificate of death in the normal way.

Gabriel, in the sudden surprise of his changed self, confused by this contradiction in his fortunes, that unexpected and overwhelming joy should have come to him out of so terrible a collapse of his happiness, resigned his own preferences for those of the older man, and was content to obey.

He had proceeded so far as the gate, when a tenderness crept over him to return once more and look upon the garden wherein so many destinies had been wrought out, that he might recall it exactly in after years. Dropping

his bag by the hedge, he passed through the alley-way of rhododendrons down to the terrace of roses.

Entering the arbour, he gazed at the grey tracery of Monbridge, with the river flowing by, and smiled at remembering the continents of moods which he had traversed since his eyes had first rested on that sight—and sighed. Going from rose-tree to rose-tree, he wished them all “Good-bye,” and felt sorry at leaving.

Just as he was about to ascend, he caught a glimpse of the bush which had borne the flower between whose petals Helen had slipped her note. Drawing nearer, he saw that the wind had scattered its leaves and withered it away. In its destruction he discerned a sign, as he now saw a portent in the death of that small red-breasted bird which Mary had rescued on his first night in Wildwood, which had perished from the heat of his hand. Baring his head before departing, he quoted, “Then saw I not the bright light which was in the clouds, but now the wind passeth and cleanseth them. Fair weather cometh out of the north; with God is terrible majesty.”

Striking the highway by a short cut through the fields, he tramped along, shouldering his bag, until a farmer, trotting townwards, overtook and offered him a lift.

“Where be you travelling?”

“To London.”

“To London! Heaven help us, that be a mighty wicked place, where all our runagates gad. You look to be an honest gentleman.”

“More or less,” replied Gabriel, after which conversation of courtesy their interest in one another flagged.

Half-way down the hill they saw a lady, leading a saddle-horse, in whom Gabriel recognized Helen. He asked the farmer to put him down and wait for a minute.

“What do you want?” he asked her gently.

She cast down her eyes and flushed.

“Last night I could not sleep for thinking over what I said to you about hating her. I am coming to do what I ought to have done last night—to wish her happiness.”

“It is too late,” he answered slowly; “she is dead.”

With a cry of distress Helen looked up. “Dead!” she whispered. “Not dead?”

“She died last night. There is yet Meredith for you to comfort.”

“Poor Dan,” she moaned, covering her face with her hands. Then, after a pause, “But you are happy! Gabriel, tell me, why are you happy?” There was fierce reproach in her voice.

“Because God has come to me, as He has come to her. There is no happiness without Him.”

She gazed upon her lover in anger and bewilderment.

“This is the day, almost the hour, upon which you were to have married her,” she said.

“God willed it otherwise, and God knew best.”

“But I don’t understand. She is dead, and you are smiling! She is dead; you said that she was dead.”

“My poor Helen, go to Wildwood; Meredith will tell you.”

Slowly she began to move up the hill, and Gabriel, having watched her out of sight, clambered into the cart and proceeded on his way to Monbridge, and thence to London.

Up the hill she went until, coming to more level ground, she remounted. Think as she would, she could not realize or reconcile this latest freak of fate. That Gabriel should smile and seem content in the presence of such a disaster was monstrous to her. Had he reproached her, reviled himself, spoken wildly and blasphemed, she could have understood him—all this would have been natural and in accord with that which she would have expected from one

of his temperament. But that he should meet her composedly, on such a morning, when all the world seemed so glad to be alive, and on the very road upon which he should have been travelling to his wedding, and there tell her, without a trace of grief, that the bride was dead—that was too horrible. She, with her youth and pride in her beauty, had learnt to look upon death as the worst unhappiness which could befall—the tragedy of tragedies, the grief of griefs. Often she had crept to the mirror that she might run her fingers over the soft texture of her skin and the glossy fabric of her hair, to make sure that she was still alive, shuddering with dread at the thought that all these would one day be as nothing, lying forgotten and out of sight in the depth of some lonely grave. To be alive, for the more sensuous delight of feeling, moving, loving, admiring, was to her the boon of boons—after life there was nothing.

Yet in the presence of death he had looked complacent, smiled, packed his bag, and gone in search of new adventures!

Something like loathing grew up within her, and, with it, an admiring fear; fear of the magnificent callosity of a man who, being himself an atom of a moribund creation, could bring himself to dispense so lightly with the life of another, as though he were immortal; admiration, because she felt herself to be so incapable of such an iron evil.

Nevertheless, side by side with this sickening sense of repulsion, was the hint of a possible misjudgment; a reserve opinion. She could not disguise the change in his personality of which she had been made conscious; an unutterable calm which could not have been generated by mere hardness of heart. Toiling with her conjectures, she rounded the bend which brought within view the ascent to Meredith's house.

There in the sunlight he sat as of old, the bees hum-

ming to their hives, the hollyhocks standing row on row, a book spread open across his knees.

Urging her horse up the hill, she dismounted and walked to where he was seated. At the rustle of her dress he looked up, and seeing her, arose.

“Is this true, Dan? is she really dead?”

“She is dead.”

“But you do not look sad, Dan; and Gabriel told me last night that she was your daughter.”

“That is true; but she is dead.”

“But—but I don’t understand. I met Gabriel not an hour ago and he was smiling, and going away, and even you are not unhappy.”

“She has departed, and is with Christ—which is far better.”

“But you were fond of her, Dan?”

“I would willingly have died for her.”

“Then why are you not sad?”

In Meredith also she noticed that same unalterable, indefinable tranquillity which she had noticed in Gabriel, and mistaken for callousness. Surely here could be no hardening of heart.

“Helen—for I used to call you Helen before you grew up—there are more evil things than death. At its worst death is only the beginning of a newer and better life—of being with Jesus. Last night we saw God stretching out His hand to take her; therefore we are glad.”

“But how, Dan—how? I have heard all these phrases before; they mean so little and cover up so many unanswerable doubts.”

“All doubts are answerable for those who believe.”

Then, questioning her as to how much she already knew about himself, he told her his life’s history and of the beginning last night of the new heart in Gabriel.

She listened attentively to the end. “It is very wonder-

ful. You must give me time to think ; I cannot grasp it. It is too wonderful," she said.

Then she told him of herself and of the hasty words which she had spoken concerning Mary, and of the purpose of her present journey.

"I should like to see her just once," she said.

At that moment the sound of wheels was heard from below, and Helen perceived the high dog-cart of Sir Danver pulling up at the gate.

"I should like to see her alone if possible, Dan ; I had very bitter thoughts about her last night."

Meredith, who had been waiting for Sir Danver's coming, led her out by the back way, and, having pointed to where Folly Acre lay and having set her upon the right path, returned to meet his new guest.

Helen, as she walked along between the high trees through which the sunlight filtered and fell, strove in vain to realize the meaning of all that which she had lately heard. Here, as she passed, a rabbit ran across her track and a red-breast hopped under cover ; squirrels were in the tree-tops, and a lark, high up and out of sight, was trilling. Had no one any just and angry pity for the death of this young girl ? Was there no one to be sorry for her ? A generous indignation against the merriment of the day brought tears to her eyes. "I, at least, will be sad for her," she said.

On through the green-wood she travelled, passed up the moss-grown path, and stood before the threshold. Two rooks, which had been perched upon the gutter of the house, rose insolently up and flew leisurely away with a studied slowness, as though in protest against her coming—the only mourners dressed in black which she had seen that day.

The door was on the latch ; but she hesitated to enter, recalling the bitterness which she had entertained in her life toward the dead. She looked in through the windows,

and thought of all the other faces which had peered through them in the long length of years ; faces which had resolved into the common dust ages since, whose eyes could no longer see. All the comings and goings of generations of families filed before her eyes ; the petty details which had comprised their passionate life, the marriages, feastings, quarrelings, love-makings, and deaths, of which there was no more record than if they had never been. This girl, the last of them all, lay dead within. In the reflection she saw nothing but finality. To-day's world seemed to her a dreary farce, a burlesque of yesterday's, to which was appointed a kindred end.

Summoning her courage, she pushed open the door. The room was bright and polished, marked with the careful tokens of the toil of those dead hands. The ashes of a fire still glowed, throwing out a smouldering heat. In the far corner, beneath the gallery, stood a bed, over which was spread a sheet ; and something under it. Down by the side drooped a delicate arm and hand, the fingers empty and partly doubled, seeking a hand to hold.

Crouching beside it, Helen slipped her own into that of the dead, so that she almost fancied the fingers gripped and the body stirred.

"Come back !" she whispered. "I want you to have him. I have come to tell you so."

She waited for an answer.

"I told him last night that I wanted you to have him. Come back !" The fingers seemed to hold the tighter ; but the body did not move.

"Oh, cannot you hear me ? If you will only come back I will love you as a sister. I have never had a sister. I feel I could love you now."

In her excitement she had released the hand. When she had done speaking, she noticed how it swung to and fro ; empty again ; bidding her begone.

In the pause which followed, she became aware of the austerity of the silence which she had desecrated. Bending lower over the bedside she whispered, "Is there nothing that I can do for you?" Her answer was the respite from sound.

"I should like to kiss you before I go," she said. The dead hand moved stiffly and reluctantly toward her lips as she drew it up. Then she saw the thorn-wound upon it, jagged and red, and wept over it, moaning, "Poor wounded hand," and touched it also with her lips.

"I should like to kiss your face," she said.

The wind blowing in at the open door rippled the shroud, making it seem as if the body beneath were struggling to rise."

She pulled back the covering, and for a moment gazed upon the face.

The muscles had relaxed as the body had chilled, bringing back to the countenance something of its old wayward sweetness; only the agonized apartness of the mouth, and the blue, rude circle around the throat served to signify by what means the spirit had contrived its departure.

"And they can look upon you and be glad!" she groaned. "And they call that religion!" But the body lay at rest, quite heedless.

With a sob she kissed the forehead, put back the sheet, and passed out into the sunlight.

Walking toward the farm, deep in conversation, she saw Meredith and Sir Danver. She slipped behind a tree and waited till they were out of sight.

Then, returning to Meredith's cottage along the track by which she had come, remounting her horse she also rode away.

CHAPTER XXXI

REMAKING THE WORLD

THE sunshine had followed him up from the hillsides to London. As he drove through the Turnpike, with its accustomed sounds and sights, the roadway blazed out, a bar of molten gold, to proclaim his coming. It was as though every most scattered ray had hurled itself in this last attempt to honour his defeat.

His ears had become so attuned of late to the quiet of the country that the roar and rattle of London seemed to his fancy to be of unwonted volume, like a hoarse huzza of applause which ran ahead, arising at his coming, dying out at his departing, welcoming him back.

Somehow the pavements looked more crowded and the streets fuller, as if the world had flocked together on that day to see some great spectacle.

He noticed again that anxiety of expectancy, which had so often haunted him in the former days, in the eyes of the people. They were seeking after something or some one ; seeking, seeking.

Now and then he saw some leisurely stranger halt and stare after him, as after the possible object of his quest. Was he also saying, "Stand still, true poet that you are" ?

Gabriel wondered vaguely whether this might not be so, whether after all he might not be the deliverer whom all men sought. To deliver, one must first have been delivered ; that he had been.

Beyond all else, thoughts of Lancaster and the purpose of his abnegated life occupied Gabriel's mind, making tender and enthusing him at every nearer approach to his friend's presence. The words of that last letter echoed in his ears: "I feel now what Christ must have felt (though I am still none of His) when he said, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest.' I have been so praying, and you know that I have never prayed for anything before, that the Lord Jesus may send you."

Gabriel, looking upon this multitude of clamorous teeming life, understood the compassion of those words. He felt that he would like to stand up there in the heart of that dizzy throng and say something which might restrain the hurry of their feet, and bring peace into their eyes. Peace! He sought everywhere for peace in the rude sketch of careers which was scrambled across these men's and women's features. Energy was there; passion was there; love was there; but no hint of peace.

"For what are they all hurrying?" he asked. "Where is the goal of their perfervid desire?"

Now he recognized what Lancaster had laboured and was dying for—that he might give these weary ones peace.

He had arrived within a hundred yards of his old place of residence. The Gothic steeple of St. Lawrence towered high over all, unsombre for once in the summer light; costers' barrows jostled against the kerb-stones, as of old; vendors cried their wares; and between these contrasts of silence and of sound the sign of the Weeping Woman hung scarlet against the sky—motionless and battered, bearing upon its blistered surface the familiar image.

The shop was closed, so he rang the bell, waiting to be admitted. Thus occupied he noticed a scattered array

of disreputables hovering around, their furtive eyes upon him. He wondered as to their purpose.

A couple of men, and then a woman, came and stood for a minute beside him, staring hard at the door, and passed on. A little ragged girl, who had been waiting near by, seeing that he in some way belonged to the house, gathered up courage to pull at his sleeve. "Hey, mister, tell us what it says; Mother wants to know."

This called his attention to something which he had not noticed—an envelope gummed above the letter-box, with writing upon it. Stooping down he read aloud: "Mr. Lancaster is no better. His doctor says that there is no chance of recovery. He is conscious, and sends his love to all his friends, and says he hopes that, though he will never see them again, they will sometimes remember him, and try for his sake to live well."

"Thank you, sir," said the little girl, beginning to whimper as she slowly walked away.

He was wondering who the friends were who needed this information when the door was opened, and Kate stood before him.

"Come in, Mr. Gabriel," she said; "we have been expecting you."

Her face was thinner, her eyes deeper, her voice softer and more subdued—some subtle change had crept through her while he had been absent, a change for which he could find no name.

"What is the news?" he asked.

"Only that he is still living. He has been waiting for you all day."

Gabriel went softly up-stairs, and was met by Hilda.

"Is it really true," he whispered, "that John is dying?"

"It is really true; but he is sleeping now." There was no trace of sadness in her voice, only a sense of quiet smiling.

Entering the room in which they had lived so much together, she told him briefly all that had happened since his departure.

Throughout the winter John and she had followed out the plan which they had set before themselves—to live Christ's life ; speaking no word of blame ; refusing shelter to none ; showing compassion to whosoever came their way ; denying themselves everything ; giving everything to all ; healing where they could ; regaining those who had fallen ; expending themselves in every way for the *gone-under*.

This had entailed late nights, early mornings, harder work, sleeping where they could in the crowded house, often on the floors ; less food, because they could not eat while others starved under their very roof ; innumerable small privations which had totalled up to the diminution of Lancaster's vitality. It came out in the course of the story that it had been their habit to scour the streets at midnight, when the entrails of the city lay bare, in search of such women as Kate had been, and of the men who had been their accomplices—to gather them all into the charitable walls of the Weeping Woman. In all these doings Kate had taken no part, had stood aloof, condemning and sullen. The day before Christmas she had disappeared, leaving a note which stated that she did not intend to return. Night after night they had searched London for her, planning out their districts, until one drizzling evening, about eleven o'clock, they had discovered her near Wapping, starving and penniless. They had brought her home and reinstated her in their household without a word of accusation. Gradually under their persistent tenderness the barren lands of her nature had begun to unfreeze. During her absence anxiety on her behalf had weighed heavily upon Lancaster's mind. He had attached an unreasoning blame to himself, imagining that her flight had

been prompted by some unconscious coldness of his own towards her. This had made him the more reckless of his health in her search. He had spent entire nights pacing the lowest quarters of the city, glancing into every woman's face, hoping that he might recognize hers. In these wanderings he had contracted chill after chill; due, partly to his habit of apportioning his warmer wrappings, mufflers and overcoats, to the starvelings of the street, partly to the severe inclemency of the winter weather.

Little by little he had sickened, never speaking a word of his suffering to any one, dispensing his most necessary comforts, when he needed them most, to whosoever asked. One last torrent, coming at the end of a sweltering June day, had proved fatal. Next morning he had been forced to take his bed. This had happened a week ago. The doctor, on examination, had declared that his constitution was shattered, both lungs being wasted, and that a serious attack of pneumonia had set in.

Day by day they had seen him failing, until finally the fatal telegram had been dispatched to Wildwood.

Up to the latest minute Lancaster, though he had talked continually of Gabriel, had been averse to sending for him, not wishing to disturb his literary peace of mind and chance of success with his first book. The last letter from him to Gabriel had been penned just before his collapse, and posted the day after it had happened.

He had not been told of the telegram until after it had been sent. Since his illness Kate had been beside herself with remorse, well knowing that she was in the main responsible for it. She worshipped him now as much as previously she had thwarted him, so that she had worn herself ill by refusing both food and sleep that she might serve him night and day.

"And oh, Gabriel," Hilda concluded, "you cannot tell what this year has meant to me. At first I was frightened

and sick at heart because of the privations which our life entailed ; I showed you that once in a coward moment in this very room. It soon passed ; his love outweighed everything. We have seen little of one another, John and I, and even that only in the company of the poor people whom we have entertained ; but the sight of him, reclaiming these wretched men and women, compelling them with his love, dragging the soul into their eyes, and sending them away happy, where before they had been miserable, has been to me like a glimpse of Christ."

"But what will you do when he has gone?" asked Gabriel, thinking of the things which he himself had learnt, and wondering whether any part of his experiences had been shared.

She looked up into his face with a smile. "I shall just go on my way, trying to do the things which he has done, and getting ready to live with him again."

"You, too, have learnt it?" he panted, seizing her hands.

"Yes ; I have learnt it too."

"And what of John?" he asked. "Has he learnt it? Does he believe?"

"There is no need for him to believe—he acts."

A footfall was heard upon the stair. Kate stood at the door.

"He has wakened up, and wants to see Mr. Gabriel at once."

"Is it wise that I should see him to-night?" he asked of Hilda.

"No wisdom can save him now," she said. "We can only hope to keep him with us a few days at most ; you had better go ; you will make him happy."

The room in which he lay was the study, an attic at the top of the tall, lean house. A bed had been erected near the window, the sash of which was flung up wide, letting

in the clanging, rhythmic clatter of the street below. As Gabriel entered his eye fell upon tiers of shelves naked of books, speaking eloquently of the narrow straits to which their philanthropies had reduced them ; also, of the extremities of sacrifice to which Lancaster had been pushed, for to a man of his temperament his books had been as the pulsing blood of life.

As Gabriel approached the bedside Lancaster tried to raise himself up on one arm, but fell back weakly. Gabriel ran to support him. "Oh, it is nothing," he said ; "never mind, I shall be stronger for a little while now that you have come. I have so longed to see you."

"I wish you had sent for me earlier," Gabriel cried. "If I had known I would have come." Now that he stood face to face with the waning shadow of his friend his heart vibrated within him with its old frenzy. For the moment he forgot the new strength which had come into his life, and shrank before the threatening billow of despair.

"But now you have come, and we are together again, nothing matters," Lancaster sighed.

Gabriel laid his cheek upon the pillow, so that his lips touched the sick man's hair, repeating, "No, nothing matters."

With characteristic self-forgetfulness Lancaster began to question him about his doings, his pleasures at Wildwood, and his book. Gabriel checked him, saying, "John, we have deeper things to talk of in these last hours. I have found the success for which I have not sought, while you have been living it."

The large, eager eyes caught a new fire. "You have learnt to pray, Gabriel?"

"Yes ; I have learnt to pray."

Then, omitting the more harrowing parts of his

experience, he narrated how, at the end of the fight, he had found Christ.

When the story was finished Lancaster motioned to them to raise him up on the pillows; and when they, fearing over-excitement, seemed unwilling, "If I live till morning I am content," he said. So they did his bidding.

There in the dim room, within sound of the hubbub of life, amid the reflected lights of an earthly Babylon, they loitered through the hollow lands of their hopes and dreams. In the presence of this perishing entity, symbol and ultimate of all futilities, they piled up together, he and they, the phantom fabric of a new world.

Opposite the window knelt Gabriel, holding the wasted hand. At the foot of the bed, erect and vigilant, to protect the rapidly crumbling house of her love, sat Hilda—immobile, her hands thrown back. In the dusk of the doorway, unbrave and inconsolate, crouched the figure of Kate, the woman whom he had died to save—a Magdalene repentant almost too late.

"If you can honestly pray," whispered Lancaster, "you can accomplish anything. I could only once, that time for you, Gabriel, though I have tried often. When I have gone upon my knees, in the hour of my greatest need, and agonized that I might speak out my desire, the old doubts and memories of my lost opportunities have drifted before my eyes and blotted out the face of God; that the face was still there behind all things, seeing me through my losses, though my eyes were blind, in my heart of hearts I think I have never doubted. When I look back upon all that is past I am convinced that God did not want me to pray. He sealed my lips that my hands might express. With you it is otherwise; He has brushed your lips with His lips, and held your hands in His own."

He paused, panting for breath, and then continued.

“You can accomplish more than I—much more. I have been your John the Baptist, preparing the way, making many mistakes, yet picking up the small sharp stones from the road that the treading might be smoother to your feet. I have been only a road-mender, making the path easier for you at the start, while your feet are weak and tender. Before you have come to the end of your journey children will be strewing palm-branches for you to ride over, and men will be casting their garments in the way as you pass up to Jerusalem. I have been only a road-mender, yet I have done God’s work and am happy.”

“Oh, John, I feel, while you have been speaking, that what you say is true. Remembering what you have done I shall be strong to do something great. Tell me before you die what is it that I must do ; how is it that I must commence ? ”

The eyes were closed ; he was exhausted and sinking rapidly, but the lips still moved. “Proclaim liberty to the captives, and opening of the prison to them that are bound. Proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and comfort to all that mourn. Appoint unto them that mourn in Zion beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness ; give unto all men Christ.”

The long-vowelled words droned out in a whispered monotone, rising and falling like the last flickerings of a burnt-out lamp. In the dusk and dirge of that unquiet city they seemed not a part of the speaker, but far-blown, oracular, immense.

A stifled sob of the woman by the door aroused him to consciousness. “Who was that crying ? ” he asked. “No one must cry when I am dead.”

Disentangling his hand from Gabriel’s grasp he let it wander over the coverlet till it rested upon the head of

Kate, who had now run wildly forward at hearing his question.

“Don’t cry, little lady,” he said tenderly. “You are going to help Gabriel and Hilda to remake the world; you are one of us now.”

“Oh, I will, I will,” she sobbed. “But I am very wicked, and you are dying because of me.”

“As you will die because of others. Who shall say but that in some other age God may send you back to die for me, Kate? I want you to remember, whenever you see a little starving child, that it may be me. Be kind to everything for my sake.”

“And you forgive me?” she cried.

“When one loves very much there is no room for forgiveness; there are no sins when sins are all forgotten.”

The eyes closed again and breathing came more gently, only the twitching of the fingers denoted that the worn spirit still lingered in its old habitation.

Suddenly the silence was profaned by the babel of an angry wrangling without; the voices of two women, husky with drink, clamoured in vile altercation. Then there was the soft “pung” of blows, followed by a thud. More voices, and silence again.

The lips stirred. “Those are the people whom you have got to save when you make a new world.”

“We will save them,” whispered Hilda; “and you will think of us saving them when you are gone, and ask the dear Lord to help us.”

Raising himself up with a sudden return of strength his gaze groped blindly around the four walls and centred on those three watching friends. He smiled tenderly and, strange to say of one so weak, compassionately upon them. “I shall not stay long away. I shall come again to you and be with you when you do not know it, sitting up with you late at night and walking with you by day. We

shall go together into people's houses and teach them to be kinder, and wash away all griefs, remaking the world. Now I am very tired and should like to sleep."

One by one he kissed and bade them "Good-night," as though unconscious that death was anything other than dusk preceding full day.

"Good-night, Kate; be a good girl, and learn to love others, so that you may be prepared to die for them."

"Good-night, Gabriel; we have been good friends, we shall be better some day, when you come to talk over with me all that you have done."

"Good-night, Hilda; it will not be for long; we shall meet again."

One by one they approached smilingly, catching the note of his own glad confidence, and returned him his own "Good-night."

Hilda rearranged his pillows, and laid him down to sleep. The light from the street shone full upon his face, but he did not seem to heed it. There was no movement about him save that made by the low intake and exit of the breath.

There through the long night they sat: Gabriel at the head, Hilda at the feet; the penitent woman crouching beside the bed, her hair broken loose, trailing across her face, her hands clasped and thrown out. None spoke; they were listening for the beat of the angel's wings.

The roar of London drowsed, and fell into a troubled rest.

Now and again the quiet would be startled by the beat of a horse's hoofs as a belated hansom sped suburbwards. Myriad stars drifted out; floated across the sky; vanished into space. Gabriel, in watching them, thought how strange it was that those same eyes had looked down upon him in Wildwood among such other scenes. The wise old moon cast down her cynic gaze, as much as to say, "It has

all happened before; it will all happen again. I see thousands of men and women die every night in the course of my journeyings. It is really nothing new. So wags the world; one grows accustomed to death in a million years. I have."

Before morning Gabriel dozed; this was the second of his toilsome nights. He was awakened by the chill of an icy hand laid upon his. Opening his eyes, he saw Hilda striving to arouse him. "It is all over for him in this world, I think," she said.

Gabriel looked, and saw that the bosom no longer heaved; placing his hand upon the forehead, he found it already cold.

"Yes," he said, "it is all over for him in this world; but what of the next?"

An exultant look glorified her features. "We need not fear for him in any other life," she said. "He has remade our world."

The sheaf of shadows kneeling before the bed stirred; a white, despairing face looked up. "Oh, he is dead," it cried, "and I loved him so! I sinned and was cruel, and went away because I longed to have him to myself. Now I have killed him, and he is dead."

"Hush!" whispered Hilda, bending over the weeping woman, "we can both love him now without difference; now that he is dead."

Putting her arms around Kate, and supporting her head upon her shoulder, she led her out from the room and put her to bed, though she herself was very tired.

Gabriel, when left alone, stood above the dead man's body, gazing down upon the stern, yet gentle, outlines of his face. Raising the limp white hand to his lips, he kissed it, saying, "I pledge myself, by all that is most sacred, to copy you in remaking the world. I will compel men to treasure one another by the example of my own

love, and thus cause God's kingdom to come upon Earth through the love of His Christ."

Looking out through the window, when he had finished speaking, he saw thrown up in the East a white, many-fingered hand, which bore witness to his vow ; and so he knew that the dawn had come.

CHAPTER XXXII

LOSING THE BATTLE

FIVE weeks had gone by since the death of Lancaster, and August had brought again that intensity of delight, peculiar to it alone of all the months, when the daring Summer has reached its height, and hangs poised above the Autumn cliffs, before with one swift leap it lies shattered upon the Winter rocks below.

London was comparatively empty. Every one had escaped to sea or country who could contrive a way ; only those who were either too poor or too rich to afford to go remained.

Gabriel sat in Lancaster's old study in the Turnpike, at a table which he had drawn up to the open window. He held two letters in his hand, which he turned over thoughtfully, reading them again.

One was from his father, reminding him that the twelve months' limit had just expired, and stating that he expected to be in town that day, and would reserve the evening for their meeting.

The long absence from his only child had worked a softening in the father's heart. He had heard, through the agency of Sir Danver Cartwright, also from the sympathetic lips of Meredith, who had seen him personally, the story of Gabriel's doings since the August of the previous year. The letter closed by saying, "I do not blame myself, even in the light of what has occurred, for

that which I have done. You have learned more about yourself, and your own needs, in a twelvemonth, than I could have taught you in as many years. I also am willing to confess that I have become more wise. When you left me last summer, your character was like a blank sheet of paper—white, but of little real value in itself. Now that it has been scrawled and blotted by the master-hand of Fate, it has become of consequence to you and to us all.

“You will remember how I said to you, ‘Men fight and lose the battle.’ That is what we have both been doing. I thought to force you to my purpose, and you, circumstance to yours. In a sense we have both failed. What we fought for has come about in spite of our defeat, only it has turned out to be not what we meant. Instead of estrangement I love you more dearly than ever I did, and am prepared to stand by you in whatsoever you may undertake. Best of all, you have found yourself. I am getting to be an old man; we should love while we may. You are my only child and I feel the need of you. I think you must sometimes feel the need of me.”

The second letter seemed to be of quite another character, for as Gabriel read it he made little wry, facial comments, twisting and fingering the page. It had been written a week previous, was in the Poet’s handwriting, and had been redirected by Meredith from Wildwood.

Illustrating how completely the old ambitions of his former life had been stripped from him since the coming of the change, was the fact that all anxiety concerning the welfare of his book had vanished as completely as the manuscript itself when it had slipped into the letter-box. The letter ran—

“I have read your book with a strange sensation of pained delight. Very frequently I have paused in the reading of some exquisite passage and have jealously thrown it aside, exclaiming bitterly, ‘And I was once

capable of that!’ Your book has been to me the vivid and accusing likeness of my flaming youth, thrust by some chance stranger into my pale old hands. Yes, you are all that I might have been. I was not mistaken; you are the great poet for whose coming all men wait, and you are my very self. I have imparted my secret to several of the Dreamers of Dreams. They are amazed at the new strength which you have developed. Some of your younger work, which you showed me last winter, had far too much of the sad note in it ever to be widely read. As you are probably aware, the world of to-day has blinded its eyes to sorrow, to the end that it may persuade itself that sorrow is no longer in the world. Of course the world of to-day is mistaken; bulk opinion always is. My own experience should have taught me that. Nevertheless, it is very necessary that you, at the outset, should keep the world’s preferences in mind; after all, it is bulk opinion which buys your books and makes your reputation.

“It was the observance of the mourner’s tendency in your genius which prompted me so forcibly to suggest your removal to the country. I am glad that the advice has had the desired effect. A joyous abandon is conspicuous in your later verses; where grief does occur it is not of the grime of the soul or of cities, but of the melancholy of fields and woodlands—a grief with which most of your readers are unacquainted, and to which, therefore, they will not object. Don’t think that I am trying to be cynical; I am not. At the end of my life, counter to all my prejudices, I am attempting to be practical for your sake. Honesty in some professions may be profitable, but in literature it does not pay.

“In your early poems, to which I have referred, you blaze out men’s duty with no uncertain sound. You accuse the world without mercy, painting for us the agony of the down-trampled with an almost evangelical fervour. That

we do not know that miserable people exist is our one excuse for not helping them. Passionate apostles, who point us where our duty lies, are never thanked; we hang them upon a cross between two pessimists. On the strength of your new vein I think you will achieve a large success. Your book is so irresistibly happy that it cannot avoid the winning of applause. In the other books which you may write——”

Gabriel laid down the letter, and throwing back his head, indulged in a quiet laugh. How completely this criticism, which was meant to be flattering, revealed himself to himself! The flight from unhappy reality; the bolstering up of exquisite untruth; the avoidance of the vital; the search after the non-essential; the closing of eyes to all unpleasantness till it almost ceased to be; the withheld hand of helpfulness; the preference for dreams over lives.

As frequently occurs when, by the sorcery of the camera, a portrait is produced like, yet unlike: over-emphasizing certain qualities in a countenance, and uncovering others which have from birth lain hid, so that the dead picture becomes more true than the living face, so had this letter, ignorant of its own skill, sketched in actual proportion the features of that dead Wildwood-self. Gazing upon it impartially he could now recognize how much of the by-gone remained, what had departed, and what had been brought under the new control to serve a better end.

He ceased laughing, and, driving his fancy back to those abandoned delights, hummed out with rapping knuckles—

“Most delicately hour by hour
He canvassed human mysteries,
And trod on silk, as if the winds
Blew his own praises in his eyes,
And stood aloof from other minds
In impotence of fancied power.”

“Well, old comrade, you are dead,” he sighed, regarding the face revealed in the letter. “I’m afraid you’ll never write any more—at least, not like that.”

During the last night at Folly Acre a curious psychologic phenomenon had occurred. From the hour of the change not only had all inclination, but also all capacity, for writing either imaginative prose or verse departed from him. It was as though some secret fibre in the brain had snapped, releasing other fibres and giving them fuller play, but irrevocably destroying itself.

When, in dispatching his book to the publisher, he had said, “Good-bye, books; you are the greatest book that I shall ever write,” he had spoken more truly than he had known at the time.

During the last five weeks which he had spent at the Weeping Woman he had become aware of his deprivation—that the poetic fame which he had striven so strenuously to gain had now become impossible for him—that he could no longer sing.

Just as in feudal times the royal forester, having caught a noble hound trespassing, was wont to mutilate its right foot that it should no longer race through the green-wood hunting the shadowy deer, so had the invisible forester, Life, owning a master perchance no less royal, cut off from Gabriel the feet of his poetic flight, leaving him crippled in the whispering woods of his illusions—making it necessary for him, as for the poor maimed brute of Norman days, to limp between the tall trees where once he ran.

He was quite resigned. In the year of his power, when to think was to express, he had dreaded this as a calamity. Now that it had come he only smiled, and was, if anything, a little grateful. Talent in song had differentiated him from the rest of his fellows. Now his most earnest wish was to be named as one of them. Since

Lancaster's death he no longer feared to die obscurely in the Turnpike.

Genius had stood between him and his friendships, barricading the outflow of his affections; now he was passionate to love rather than to be loved. Intellectual pride had been his hindrance; now that the gift itself was withdrawn, and he had become as one of the common people, it was possible for him to serve. It is sometimes necessary that the lord should be degraded into the servant rank that he may learn how to rule aright. This Gabriel realized; he also thought that he recognized the master whom he served.

As from Lancaster had been withheld the power of prayer that he might make his worship with his hands, so from Gabriel had been snatched away his swiftness in song that, travelling more slowly, he might be the meeker in his passing by.

"Speed is all very well," he consoled himself, "but it does not make many friends; it is the slow-journeying man who gets to know the people of the country through which he travels."

Therefore when he read the praise contained in the Poet's letter, especially the mention of the other books which he might write, he laughed, for he knew that that other self, who had "most delicately hour by hour canvassed human mysteries and trod on silk," was ultimately and everlastingly dead.

To say that he did not care that this was so would be stating his feelings a little too strongly, for no man can look into the eyes of a forsaken self without experiencing some compassionate sensations of longing. That he was glad because of his loss, and would not have willed it otherwise, was manifestly true.

Thus while he sat ruminating in the mellow afternoon the door was pushed open, and a woman entered.

Hearing the sound of her footfall he awoke from his reverie and turned in his chair. "Why, Helen," he cried, jumping up, "I was wondering whether you would come, and had almost abandoned hope."

"How could I do otherwise?" she replied, staying his advance, and standing motionless in the middle of the room.

"But I wrote you a full statement of all that I intend to do—it will not be an easy life."

"What of that? Are easy lives always best?"

"No; I think they are never so. But you have been brought up differently—there will be hardship and disappointment to endure, and perhaps disgrace."

"I think I can bear them."

"Before you make a decision from which there is no retreat I want you fully to understand my motives in doing this. In the first place there is the feeling that, however affairs may go, I can do no other; I am appointed to this work. In the second, there is the added incentive of the knowledge that I have done much harm which must be atoned for every day of my life; above all, the harm which I did to Mary. You are one of those whom I have wronged; I have no right to make any further call upon your generosity. In some ways I think you must have suffered most; it was the knowledge of this that made me press you to take your release."

"I had always thought that it was one half the sweetness of love to suffer."

"Yes; but voluntarily. You have had no choice."

"Suffering and love go hand-in-hand. Love such as ours is always imposed—it is too great to be chosen." Gabriel, who had risen and had been leaning against the table while she spoke, now made a step towards her, but she held out a restraining hand. "Perhaps if I confess a sin to you it may help to comfort you, if ever you should

be inclined to blame yourself on my account. If you have doubted me, there has been a time when I have doubted you."

"When was that, Helen?"

"It was after our last meeting on the Monbridge road."

"Go on."

"I did not understand—you looked more glad than I had ever seen you. Then I went to Folly Acre alone—and looked on her."

"And then?"

"I thought you cruel, and wicked, and insincere."

She stood with her head hung down and hands folded.

"And what made you think otherwise?"

"Dan came up from Wildwood, when he came to see your father, and he told me it all again. And Hilda wrote to me from here, and told me what you had been doing, and of your change."

"And did you believe them?"

"Gabriel!"

There, in the quiet room whence, a year ago almost to the day, the turbulent shadow of an illusion had led him forth, it was laid at last to rest. He also had rest for the moment, till a newer shadow, already rising up, should lead him forth again.

Lying in his arms, with beating heart, she too found quiet.

"Helen, do you remember what you once said about lovers? how no man ever comes back—woman sometimes, man never?"

"Yes, I remember; but you are more than a man, you are a poet."

He laughed lightly and told her how she was mistaken; that he was no longer a poet, and could never make songs again.

"Then it was the poets I meant who never return," she said, smiling. "Now you are no longer a poet; you are something better, you are a man."

"Yes; I am now one of God's common herd; one of the people for whom Christ died. Yet there is one more song which I think I can write."

"And what is that?"

"My love upon men's lives. Oh, Helen, I have been making a back street of my heart when it should have been a metropolis. What is art, and what are books, compared with men's lives? No one is angry for the wrongs of God's poor, but I will make them angry. Here are we, three women and one man against the world; yet I think we shall win this fight. One woman, who has been a sinner; one woman, whose lover is dead; one woman who has had to wait long for her love; one man who has suffered defeat—yet I think we shall win this fight."

"How shall we fight?" asked Helen eagerly, kindling to his enthusiasm.

Then he told her again how he had arranged to carry on the business of the Weeping Woman just as it had been in Lancaster's day. How it was to be the house of the new start for the down-trodden; a home for all, where none was refused and Christ was lived. There he had planned that they should live, Kate and Hilda, and they two setting the example of the love which should remake the world.

"The world is wrong based," he cried. "We are all so selfish at heart that it is difficult to avoid losing such a battle. We can afford no half measures here. We must do as John did, hurl our talents, our health, our possessions, and even our lives into this new fight. We must work with a divine rage in our hearts for the wrongs of God's outcast people. We must mutilate ourselves for their sake,

till we incarnate in the soul of the world the soul of Christ. I have thought it all out—there is no other way.”

Helen drew his face down to her own. “You are like all other idealists,” she smiled; “the world must come right in your own way or you are not satisfied. But now that it is also Christ’s way, I believe that it will come right.”

And so, no sooner had their old illusion departed, than a new shadow rose up to beckon them forth, but a better. A fresh battle had already commenced, in which, in common with all the world, they would surely suffer defeat. These who out of their last lost battle had carried off something greater than that for which they had fought—love—were brave in the trust that, though they should again miss the victory, that which they fought for would certainly come about despite their defeat, and though, when it came, it should turn out to be other than they meant, yet God would send forth His strong men, when they themselves were turned to dust, who would fight for that which they had meant under another name, and win the day years hence for Christ.

THE END

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